



FLIP OF A COIN

FLIP OF A

COIN 2



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Front Cover by Wanda Lybarger

Back Cover by Sheila Paulson

Inside Back Cover by Wanda Lybarger

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Hello ~ again!

Here we are, back again, with the second edition of FLIP OF A COIN. We are ecstatic over the responses we've received since the release of our first issue and want to thank everyone for your encouragement and support; that means a great deal to us. Before you begin reading, though, there's a few things we'd like to mention.

As everyone should know by now, CONGRATULATIONS are in order for Harrison Ford and Melissa Mathison who were married in a quiet, civil ceremony on March 14. We want to wish these two truly talented and creative people best wishes for many, many happy years in their life together.

RETURN OF THE JEDI opened on May 25 and smashed all previous box office records. (Did you expect anything else?) Everyone connected with this film should be proud of their efforts. The pride these outstanding craftsmen and women take in their work, and their love for the STAR WARS Saga, is reflected on the screen and makes the three-year wait well rewarded. We salute George Lucas for another brilliant film. Thank you so very, very much!

We received quite a few letters of comment on issue #1, some of which we are sharing with you in a new feature called "Reviews." We enjoy and encourage a variety of comments about FLIP and want to hear what you don't like as well as what you do. However, by that we do not mean to invite or encourage negative feedback in the form of hurtful comments. If you don't like something, before you sit down to write us, make sure what you want to say is constructive and helpful and not merely a slur on the abilities of the author or artist involved, or a personal attack. If you have any suggestions for improvement, share them, but if you only want to call something awful, and it's creator untalented, please don't bother to write in. FLIP is done in fun, with a lot of love. No one is paid for their involvement; your compliments are the rewards.

October 1 is the deadline for submissions to issue #3. If the Force is with us, we'll be able to have it ready for distribution between Thanksgiving and Christmas. We have printed general guidelines for submissions at the end of our "Notices" section. You will notice that we are requesting that you send two copies of your written material, one of which will be sent to the artist for illos. We are also requesting that you include a SASE with sufficient postage in case we need to return it. As you can see, both these requests help to keep expenses down, which helps to keep FLIP solvent.

Regarding the guidelines, one thing we'd like to point out is that we're pretty flexible, so, if your work presents an exception, contact us. If it's good enough, we might change our minds.

Last, but not least, we'd like to wish Harrison a very happy birthday on July 13!

Well, guess that covers everything so we'll close for now and let you get on with reading. We do hope that you enjoy this issue and will let us hear from you.

Until next time...

Bye bye!

Paula and Jenny

REVIEWS

Lynda Vandiver, Madisonville, Kentucky

Congratulations on the "birth" of your new fanzine! Hope both "parents" are doing well. The first issue of FLIP OF A COIN, of which I hope there will be many, many more, was truly a lovely tribute to Mr. Harrison Ford.

Once I got past the beautiful artwork by Dunster on the cover (it took three days!), my eye was readily caught by the layout of the contents page. I really liked the way you put the character next to the story or poem; it let us know who the work was about at a glance. I especially liked the statement at the bottom of the page (We're just trying to have a little fun.) That sums up why I'm into fandom.

I read each story and poem and enjoyed all the artwork and I must say, you certainly had some of the best writers and artists to complement your first issue. Really enjoyed the wide variety of characterizations. One could, within the confines of the zine, go from "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away..." to the exciting and futuristic world of Blade Runners in 2019.

I'm sure all your readers appreciate your dedication in bringing us one of the best fanzines available and eagerly look forward to issue #2. I know I do.

Suzy Sansom, Danville, California

I received FLIP #1 today and I thoroughly enjoyed your first issue. Obviously, a lot of talent, hard work and dedication went into producing this zine which demanded my attention for the full three hours of prime time tonight (sorry, Mr. Wouk). I found a great deal of variety which was refreshing. I particularly enjoyed "A Rainbow Above You," "Toast to Innocence," Scheherazade's short short, and "Deja Vu," not to mention all of the poetry which was superb.

As for the artwork, Wanda's illos enhanced "Rainbow" nicely. The covers were also very nice. And concerning the cartoon on p. 112, although the idea presented was great (so true!), I didn't feel the depiction of Ford was very complimentary. In particular, I found the area around the belt rather daring. Oh, well. No doubt I'll be the only one to pick up on or care about this specific, but I just thought I'd mention it.

Overall, it was a fine issue and a great accomplishment. My hat's off to you!

J. E. Ludlow, Madison Heights, Michigan

I was very impressed with issue #1 of FLIP OF A COIN. It's a nice, sturdy zine, very neat and clean, but the contents are what counts, and I remain impressed. I LOVE those cartoons! 'Course I'm a sucker for a good cartoon. I enjoyed all the stories, particularly those by D. C. Wickes and Sherry Magee. I have been following their Kenny Boyd series and have enjoyed them all. I was really happy to find two in the series in your zine. Both are very moving.

Best of luck in keeping to your announced schedule. You have a fine zine, very helpful in keeping this Ford addict happy between too-infrequent films. Keep up the quality, and I promise to be a very faithful subscriber.

J. A. Berger, Fair Oaks, California

Nice job! So much Kenny, Tommy, Rick, Han, David, Indy, Martin, and Willy Bill, a variety no FORDaholic could find fault with, only increasing enjoyment. FLIP, on the whole, is a beautifully organized and artistic composition of Ford characterizations. Each submission had its own brand of excitement and each very professionally handled. I was more than pleased with the outcome. But, if you think there's any way possible you're going to get this fan writer to pick a favorite from your publication, forget it! I'm proud to say, with only a couple of exceptions, all of your contributors are personal friends. I felt like it was "family reunion time" in fandom; a mini-con between the pages of a zine, what great fun! Quick, let's do it again! Okay, I'm back at the typewriter and the next one is coming...I would like to see you be able to make FLIP a quarterly. Good luck and all my support.

D. C. Wickes, Hollywood, California

The first issue of FLIP OF A COIN has obviously landed heads up! In addition to my delight in finding FLIP so blessedly free of typos, the content was enjoyable and nicely varied and the layout very complimentary to both prose and artwork. Since humorous pieces are usually my favorites, I loved "The Demise of Willie Bill" by Brin and Corbett, "Plus Cea Change" by Nussman, and the cartoons by Lybarger and Morris. "A Toast to Innocence" reflects the usual high quality of Peggy Barilla's writing. "Starting Again," by Paula, shows her sensitivity to the character of Halloran, and Jean Berger's "Reply to a Conversation" caught Martin Stett's truly chilling presence.

I must admit to personal prejudice, though, when I say my favorite pieces were Sherry Magee's "Discovery," "Kenny's Improvisation Song," by Martie Benedict, and all of Wanda Lybarger's illustrations, most especially those for my story. Apart from my obvious fondness for the character of Ken Boyd, my admiration and affection for these three talented women makes objectivity about their work an unreasonable expectation. My thanks to my friend Sherry for letting me work in her universe, and to Martie and Wanda for their wonderful contributions to it.

Also, my deepest gratitude to you two, Paula and Jenny, for all your work in bringing FLIP OF A COIN into reality. The Force is with you--I can't wait till next issue!

B. J. Evans, Vancouver, British Columbia

Congratulations on FLIP OF A COIN. I think it's going to be a hit. It was everything I have come to expect from fannish publications and a little more besides.

"A Rainbow Above You" was worth the price of the zine alone! Ken Boyd is probably my most favorite Ford character, besides Han Solo, and it's nice to see his life taking a turn for the better. Although he was only on screen briefly in HEROES, D. C. Wickes and Sherry Magee have done wonderful things with him.

I have read two of the other three Ken Boyd stories Wickes mentions and I have to say that he really makes progress in "Rainbow." Thanks to Annie McBride, it looks like Ken is finally starting to come to terms with his life, both present and future. It seemed that no matter how much Ken's cousin Sandy tried to help him, she was too close to the source of the problem. Annie had no idea of what Ken had gone through and was in a better position to be objective about things, her own problems notwithstanding. Besides, I think she and Ken kind of helped each other realize that you can't run and hide from life.

I'd like to see more of Ken and Annie together. It would be nice to watch further developments in their relationship. (See "The Way That It Goes" in this issue.) Also, it would be interesting to see Ken open up and come out into the world once more.

Do you suppose Wickes and Magee could be talked into doing a longer Ken Boyd story? I was thinking, I guess, of a sort of novella or short novel. Maybe they don't have the time but it's an idea.

I enjoyed the stories about David Halloran and Martin Stett, too. They are the first ones I have seen in fan fiction. I was beginning to wonder if anyone remembered the other characters Ford did after Han Solo except for Tommy Lillard, or before him, either.

Could Pat Nussman be persuaded to give us more of Tommy Lillard and the school marm? (Are you listening, Pat?) Seems like there could be at least one more story there. I know Pat is busy with other things, like everybody else, but perhaps she'd consider it.

On the whole, I enjoyed your zine immensely and am looking forward to #2. I'm sending you my deposit with this letter. Hope I've said something useful in all this. Have to congratulate you again on the good job you've done.

Joan Shumsky, Raritan, New Jersey

It was a black day for all Ford fans when FACETS decided to shut down. Then the notice regarding a new Ford zine, FLIP OF A COIN came my way and to quote Cimino, "Ladies and Gentlemen, there really is a God!"

FLIP's all-around appearance, presentation, artwork, content rate a huge "10"! Great first effort and one you can be proud of, Paula and Jenny. The artwork vote goes to Wanda Lybarger. I especially liked her illo on p. 108 of Avram, Tommy and the "princess"! Pat Nussman's crossover story was fantastic! What a clever idea--and I DO believe in reincarnation!! Why not, the idea is so perfect. Tommy and Han have a lot in common--attitudes for one thing!

My other favorites in this first issue were the HANOVER STREET alternate ending story by Paula, and Martie Benedict's "After the Mission" poem. I'm one of the few Ford fans who truly loved that movie and I think Harrison's performance was beautifully played. Watch again the scene after he aborts the mission and he is so wretchedly confused that he asks Maggie to "put him back together" because he is all in pieces. Heavy stuff, that.

The Kenny Boyd stories by D. C. Wickes and Sherry Magee were right on the money. What a fantastic treasure trove of tales Ford fans have written from only what amounted to a twenty minute on-screen performance. Another Ford effort that has been highly underrated.

"AnOther" by Scheherazade was most interesting--another speculation as to how THE MOVIE will end. The RAIDERS and BLADE RUNNER pieces were also excellent and the choices for FLIP's debut are wonderful.

The Cartoons actually made me laugh out loud which is how I rate them. My two favorites were Brad Morris' on p. 56 and Wanda's on p. 49.

Here's to another good issue in #2. Congratulations again on a wonderful first effort! Oh, almost forgot, "The Demise of Willie Bill" by Marcia and Melody really tickled me. How many of us Ford fans do the same thing? Sit up until all hours to finally catch a glimpse of "him"? Well, that's what VCR's are for, folks!!!

Ruth Radecki, Redondo Beach, California

Bravo! Just when I thought I was going to wither up and die from withdrawal, FLIP OF A COIN came along and saved me. Oh, sure, the odd references in newspapers and magazines are nice, but they are few and far between. (Methinks that Harrison hides in his house too much.) But there's nothing like hearing from the fans. After all, we're awfully talented, right? Or, if we're not talented, our hearts are in the right place. And that right place is issue #1 of FLIP OF A COIN.

Kudos to everyone involved! A masterful job if I ever saw one--you should be very proud of yourselves for turning out such a terrific product on your first try. And you picked such a wonderful variety of pieces. I almost don't know where to begin!

Wait--I do know where to begin. Before I go any farther, I'd like to extend a grateful warm fuzzy to Betsy Peed for her illo that accompanied "Daemon." Quite appropriate, and very nice. If Betsy would like to do it for me again sometime, I would have absolutely no objections.

Without a doubt my favorite piece is "A Rainbow Above You." I honestly don't think I can express my feelings about it on paper. It was left with a warm feeling after finishing it which lasted for quite a few days. (And now that I'm thinking about it again, the feeling is coming back!) Witnessing Ken's first steps on the road to sanity is a gratifying experience. It's going to be a long walk, but he's going to make it. Obviously, we all have faith in him. Any chance of Dianne taking him--and us--on more of that journey?

After "Rainbow," almost everything else is lumped together in the #2 spot. I wish I had the paper, ink, and time to comment on everything, but that would be a monumental task. So let me make the following abbreviated remarks.

"A Toast to Innocence": an interesting change of pace story. "The Demise of Willie Bill": enormously amusing. I know exactly what Marcia and Melody were talking about--I've gone through it myself. Brad Morris' cartoon: terrific! Now every time I watch BLADE RUNNER, I laugh as I cringe during that scene. "Starting Again": nice job, Paula! I honestly can't say how true to the movie it is. You see, I am one of those poor unfortunates who hasn't seen HANOVER STREET yet. (Don't worry! Thanks to our cable, I'll see it in April--finally!) "Plus Cea Change": oh, for cryin' out loud! How silly! But I'm such a fan of silly stuff, y'know. And Dianne's illo on p. 112: one of those things I wish I had thought of.

Now there's one other comment I feel I have to make, and, admittedly, it's not as complimentary as my others. (I take part of the blame for this, too.) I've read "AnOther" twice, and I get this crazy feeling that something is missing. It's like a couple pages fell out between Tallahassee and Redondo Beach. It was all a little too obscure for me. Oh well... ("AnOther" is only one episode of the "Tails of Scheherazade," of which other chapters have also appeared in THE OLD REPUBLIC READER 1, and OUTLAND CHRONICLES 1. See the author's note at the end of "Lost Embrace" which is included in this issue. Happy puzzling!)

So, except for this one rough spot, I would proclaim FLIP OF A COIN a success. Congratulations! Keep up the good work, because I will be looking forward to #2! Good luck!

Joyce Devine, Madisonville, Kentucky

FLIP OF A COIN arrived lookin' good, to say the least. If you wanted to state the quality of your work in one brief statement, you could do no better than the front cover. Few artists can give you a look-alike portrait, much less add the emotion to it that the real man exhibits. Dunster has succeeded in both, magnificently. Your desire for top quality work challenges the rest of us to meet those standards and rightfully so; Harrison gives us his best, we should do no less in return.

Well, I must turn the cover if I'm to ever get on with this letter. My first observation: (We're just trying to have a little fun). BRAVO. I've read them all in the last few months, everything from the worst to the con winners and I must admit it's the middle of the road guys that gives me the most pleasure and contentment. This is for fun--let's keep it that way. A brief comment on each story:

"A Toast to Innocence" was darling. I believe the concept is something Tommy would find himself facing and the handling of his dilemma is simple and unencumbered, much like the man himself. Very well written and entertaining.

"I Call It Luck" - I envy people that can say so much in a short space (you already know that's impossible for me). Nicely stated and sweet.

"Deja Vu" - Another single page with lots to say. You think you hear Deckard reciting this piece.

"A Rainbow Above You" - And now to Kenny--yeah. Kenny's my favorite, so needless to say, I'm thrilled to find someone giving the guy a chance. The story carries itself well and leaves you feeling wonderfully warm and cozy. I LIKED IT.

"Reflections on a Medallion" - So much can be conveyed in a brief moment of thought. It is done well here.

"The Demise of Willie Bill" - My sympathy, girls--I've seen it, too. Of course, when I saw it, I didn't have sense enough to know who to watch but I remember enough. Have courage--HANOVER STREET will make up for it. Good job.

"AnOther" - It took me a bit to catch on to the story but then since I read the whole zine nonstop, I could have been in a time warp--Civil War to Star Wars. Reading it a second time was worth the effort. Again, there's volumes in those few lines. Well written and pleasant.

"Starting Again" - The story held the tension of uncertainty without bogging down. I'm not so sure I see David Halloran running from any girl, yet that was just the thing that kept it light and enjoyable. Well done, Paula--after reading the zines you've put out, I know you're quite capable at judging other's work as well as creating your own. Keep up the good work.

"Daemon" - A normal professor Indy ain't. Well stated, Ruth.

"Discovery" - Back to Kenny (sigh). Sherry always does great work. I'm glad Dianne wanted a Kenny and the cat story, so did I. Very special for all us Kenny fans. Thanks for a job well done.

"Seaside" - Cute and simple, just like Tommy.

"Kenny's Improvisation Song" - Martie knows country boys, of course; they're all alike. She sure writes well, too.

"Somewhere Outside Los Angeles" - A good piece; sort of sad, though.

"Reply to a Conversation" - I've read several pieces by Berger. The names inspires me to buy a zine--I'll know there'll be at least one well written, comprehensible, and good characterization story and it held true again. Stett was Stett; my congratulations. I found the movie hard to relate to and, believe it or not, Berger stayed so in character with the movie, I had the same detachment with the story. I mean that as a compliment--it was a good story.

"After the Mission" - Martie weaves beauty in whatever she does. She pictures the true events in well chosen words; the entire movie and it's emotions on one page. A find accomplishment.

"Plus Cea Change" - The perfect piece to end with--when you close the covers, you just feel warm all over. Tommy and Leah? The perfect pair? Pat said it all--the rest is history. Charming.

"Just Go" - Cute and true of Solo's ladies.

Generally, the zine was put together well. A fine mixture of long and short, serious and funny. The artwork was good--some pieces could have been a bit closer to the real likeness but since I can't draw a straight line with a ruler, I'm not about to deny any artist an A for effort and encourage each of you to keep at it--the more you do, the better you'll become. I'm pleased to see two editors who will give newcomers a chance, artists and writers alike. We all need our chances and given time, we'll get better--well, maybe not me, but the rest of you have high hopes.

Your choice of type size was very readable and easy to follow. I liked the different styles in your titles and the occasional italic added just enough spice to keep the zine from becoming monotonous. I found only two typos and since I've done some heavy typing lately, my congratulations on such an extraordinary job.

You have succeeded masterfully in keeping each story true to character, well written and believable. My compliments to the editors and writers for their joint efforts that created such a happy reading experience for me.

The quality craftsmanship you've used in your zine is only matched by our respect for the man it honors. You're tops on my list, ladies--looking forward to FLIP #2 - #3 - #4 - #100.

Pat Nussman, Baltimore, Maryland

FLIP #1 is an impressive first effort--it looks crisp, professional, and a majority of both the stories and illustrations were, I thought, of good quality. I do, I'll admit, have a prejudice for reduced, double-column format (just because it's possible to fit more in that way), but I know others have just as strong a prejudice in the other direction. That aside, it's hard to find much fault with FLIP's physical appearance.

Rather than go through every story, I'd like to just mention a few items that particularly impressed me. Two stories that really caught me were the Kenny stories by Dianne Wickes and Sherry Magee, and this, despite the fact that I'd just as soon forget the Vietnam War ever happened. Wickes' story had a strong, believable developing relationship between the created female character and Kenny, something that isn't the easiest thing to do--witness the countless unbelievable female characters created for Han. Wickes resisted the temptation to make Annie the pseudo-macho female that too often is created, but made her simply a good, caring person--and, thus, rendered her interesting in her own right, as well as in relation to Kenny. I was impressed, particularly by the culminating scene of Kenny on the edge of suicide, which had a rare gripping, dramatic quality.

Sherry's complementary story was delightful and shows some considerable growth, stylistically, since her first Kenny pieces in FACETS. The combination of Kenny and the cat was simply charming.

Also, I was particularly impressed by J. A. Berger's "Reply to a Conversation." Jean's another author whose style is progressing rapidly, but even aside from that, the story is so unusual for fanfic that it would deserve applause simply from that aspect. For a Harrison fan, it would be a temptation to try to make Martin Stett into a more sympathetic character, but Jean doesn't succumb to that, but rather gives the character the same aura of manipulative evil that must have made it an intriguing role for an actor like Harrison.

Also, in the poetry department, I'd like to commend Jacqueline Taero's "Reflection on a Medallion." So few fan writers attempt rhyming poetry that it's rather remarkable when one runs across a poet who not only tries but succeeds--and with not the simplest of rhyme schemes. But then, Jacqueline's poetry is always delightful. And, naturally, I enjoyed Martie Benedict's songs/poetry--those who have Martie's tapes have been aware for a long time of the sensitive portrayals Martie manages for all of Harrison's characters.

In art, I naturally like J. R. Dunster's lovely cover portrait, but was also intrigued by Scott Lerner's impressively designed BLADE RUNNER back cover. I don't believe I've seen his work before--but I'm looking forward to more of it. Also, I have a great prejudice in favor of another of your major artists--Wanda Lybarger, who I think is one of the best two or three illustrators in fandom. I particularly liked her illustrations for the Wickes story and my own.

Thekla Kurth, Centerville, Utah

I just finished reading the first issue of FLIP OF A COIN, and enjoyed it very much. You asked for likes, dislikes, etc., so here goes--

"A Toast to Innocence" - Even though the mood of this story is rather somber, I still feel it ends on a somewhat happy note. The one thing I think is missing are illos to accompany this otherwise fine story. I would have liked to have seen a rendering of Katie. "A Rainbow Above You" and "Discovery" are my two favorite stories (but it's hard to pick favorites out of so many good offerings). I really like the way Dianne and Sherry depict Kenny. He's such a sad, tormented man. Dianne and Sherry have shown some hope for him in a future that would normally be pretty bleak and depressing. I'd really like to read more of their stories about Ken, Annie, and, of course, Jenny.

"AnOther" is certainly different, but I can see it turning out that way. From the ending, one can draw their own conclusions as to what ultimately happens. "Starting Again" is another story I really liked for the hope it gives to Halloran's future, same as the Kenny stories. I've always felt that Halloran deserved another chance to start over again in a new relationship. I'm glad somebody finally gave him that chance.

"Reply to a Conversation" is one I had misconceptions about before I read it. I mean, how much can one do with a Martin Stett story? As soon as I got into it, I found it totally intriguing and a plausible sequel to THE CONVERSATION. I'm glad now I didn't pass it by on first sight unseen. "Plus Cea Change" is a fun little gem--I happily chuckled all the way through it. Some new insights are brought up in it, too--well, they're new to me. Like maybe one of the reasons Han stays with the Rebellion at first, after the Death Star, is the same reason Tommy has for sticking around--to show Leia not to push him. Also, how much alike in some ways are Han and Tommy. The illo with this story is perfect.

I found all of the poetry to be excellent. I especially like Martie's pieces. Even with the tapes, it's still nice to have the words written down somewhere, and even better to have such lovely illos accompanying each piece. I really like Martie's illo on p. 82. It's totally in character, simply done, and yet fits the poem perfectly. I do hope Martie will illo more of her poems in the future.

Every cartoon in this issue is choice. Some cartoons don't bear remembering, but these not only are remembered, but bring a smile and a laugh each time I think about them. My favorites are p. 49, 109, and 112.

This is a great start for a first issue. I think the bio section is a good idea. I missed it this first time around. I hope you'll include it in future issues. I like to learn about others' interests, too. I appreciated the fact that you listed the character in parentheses after each title on the contents page. It makes it so much easier when looking at a contents page in a non-exclusive SW zine. I'm looking forward to FLIP OF A COIN #2, and I hope there'll be many more future issues.

Martie Benedict, Eckert, Colorado

Everything gets off to a splendid start with the cover portrait of Harrison. It's magnificent, a real tribute to the man. One expects a class act on the inside with such a great cover--and one isn't disappointed!

The only wistfulness I felt was having read so much of the material in manuscript form prior to publication. There weren't, in other words, too many surprises.

I enjoyed Peggy's "A Toast to Innocence," as an example of gentle irony. It's skillfully written and a pleasant contrast to some of the more raucous, shoot-'em-up type western stories.

I've been a great fan of the Kenny stories Sherry and Dianne spin since I first ran across them in FACETS a couple of years ago. Their obvious understanding of the character, plus their equally obvious affection for him and the folk with whom they people his world, make these tales compelling, fine reading. Not to mention the fact that both are excellent writers.

Dianne's "Rainbow" is, perhaps, a classic, or will be one day. Should be. Sherry's "Discovery" comes in its wake like the first green leaves after a spring thaw. Together they have made a world for this man to live in, and Wanda has shown us what that world looks like with all the superb skill at her command.

I'm honored that they let me play with their toys and be a small part of it with "Kenny's Improvisation Song."

Paula's "Starting Again" was another refreshing breeze with hopeful overtones. There seems among us to be a great dislike of having the man, in any of his incarnations, without a love interest for very long. And I applaud the thought! There is hope for Halloran, just as there is for Kenny, and Paula expressed hers beautifully.

Dianne's illustrative style is taking on a very polished and more professional look. It is still something of a caricature as to the Harrison likeness, though that may be exactly what's intended. I do love her females, though, gracefully poised and gentle. Her lines are sure, yet delicate. Very nice work.

J. A.'s "Reply" was exactly what I'd hoped for, though, as in the film, Martin Stett stalks at the periphery of the action, which revolves around Harry Caul, like a deadly panther rather than taking center stage. Stett is a character of shadow anyway. His menace is the quiet horror of a voice over the unlisted telephone. I liked this one very much, especially the eyebrow-raising suggestion at the end that attention was being paid to the wrong relationship. Nice point!

"Plus Ça Change" by Pat was a delight. It fit the characters perfectly. Especially liked Wanda's long, tall Tommy lounging with lazy grace by the wall. What a body!

Of the poems I greatly enjoyed "Reflections on a Medallion" by Jacqueline Taero. The final 'reflection' lines in each stanza were pithy comments. Good verse. And, of course, Brin and Corbett's hilarious "The Demise of Willie Bill!" I could have sworn it was an apple, though--or did that LIFE layout affect me overmuch? That is one frustrating film, all right.

Brad Morris' Deckard cartoon and Scott Lerner's back cover were two good artistic additions.

Random thoughts on the issue might include a touch of puzzlement as to what "AnOther" by Scheherazade was all about. It felt menacing, yet I'm not sure. A different story. And a round of applause for Wanda's beautiful and prolific interpretations. Her Tommy/Pris was laugh-out-loud funny.

There was so much here to enjoy, and I'm so pleased to have been a part of it. My congratulations on a fine first issue, and may there be many more to come.

Before Jean Ann introduced me to the zines, I had no idea of their existence. I first read only the stories that she had written and found them exciting, accurate, and fun. Then as I read further, I was surprised and pleased by the amount of talent and creative energy shown by all the contributors. In the Marketplace of FACETS and the Notices in FLIP OF A COIN, the number and apparent seriousness of purpose of the publishers of the zines I thought phenomenal. And what talented artists are represented in the cartoons and drawings! Gee Moaven is a favorite of mine, and is gifted. I agree with Harrison Ford who seems to think you guys are crazy, but believe me, it's an insanity and a creative passion that none of us can do without. Congratulations all!

Charles Gray

EDITORS' NOTE: Charles Gray has been featured in a number of J. A. (Jean Ann) Berger's stories now circulating fandom, recreating one of his past roles:

"Gunhand of Fate"-Part I/II (FACETS #9/10 and #11), "Gunhand of Circumstance" (this issue of FLIP), and "Gunslinger!", (WIDE OPEN SPACES #7). All are based on his role of Pico McGuire from the 1961/62 CBS-TV series GUNSLINGER. He was also the supporting character, Mr. Grayson, in "Reply to a Conversation, (FLIP OF A COIN #1). Mr. Gray's more popular roles included Clay Forrester of RAWHIDE and Bill Foster of THE YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS.)

Anyone who would like to write to Mr. Gray may do so in care of:

J. A. Berger
8621 Fairmont Way
Fair Oaks, California 95628



DEJA VU

T. S. Weddell

"I knew you'd come," said the tall, dark-clad figure as he turned to face the intruder.

"We have some unfinished business, you and I," the younger man replied.

As he looked at the youth, the older man felt his heart contract with the force of an old, buried pain. *How like his mother he is!* he thought sadly. Aloud, he said, "I mean to see that our business is completed. I've dismissed my guards so that you could reach my quarters unhindered. We won't be disturbed."

"That was a mistake, because I intend to kill you."

"I know. You can certainly try," the tall man answered gravely. "You learned from a powerful teacher--but so did I."

The young man's only response was to press the button on the hilt of his lightsabre. With the familiar lightning-strike crackle and hum, the two energy beams sprang into life, pale bluish blade pitted against glowing red. The duel was furious but brief, as it quickly became apparent that the contest was unequal. Although the youth was possessed of an exceptional natural talent and courage and had sharpened his skills with long practice, he was sadly over-matched by his older adversary.

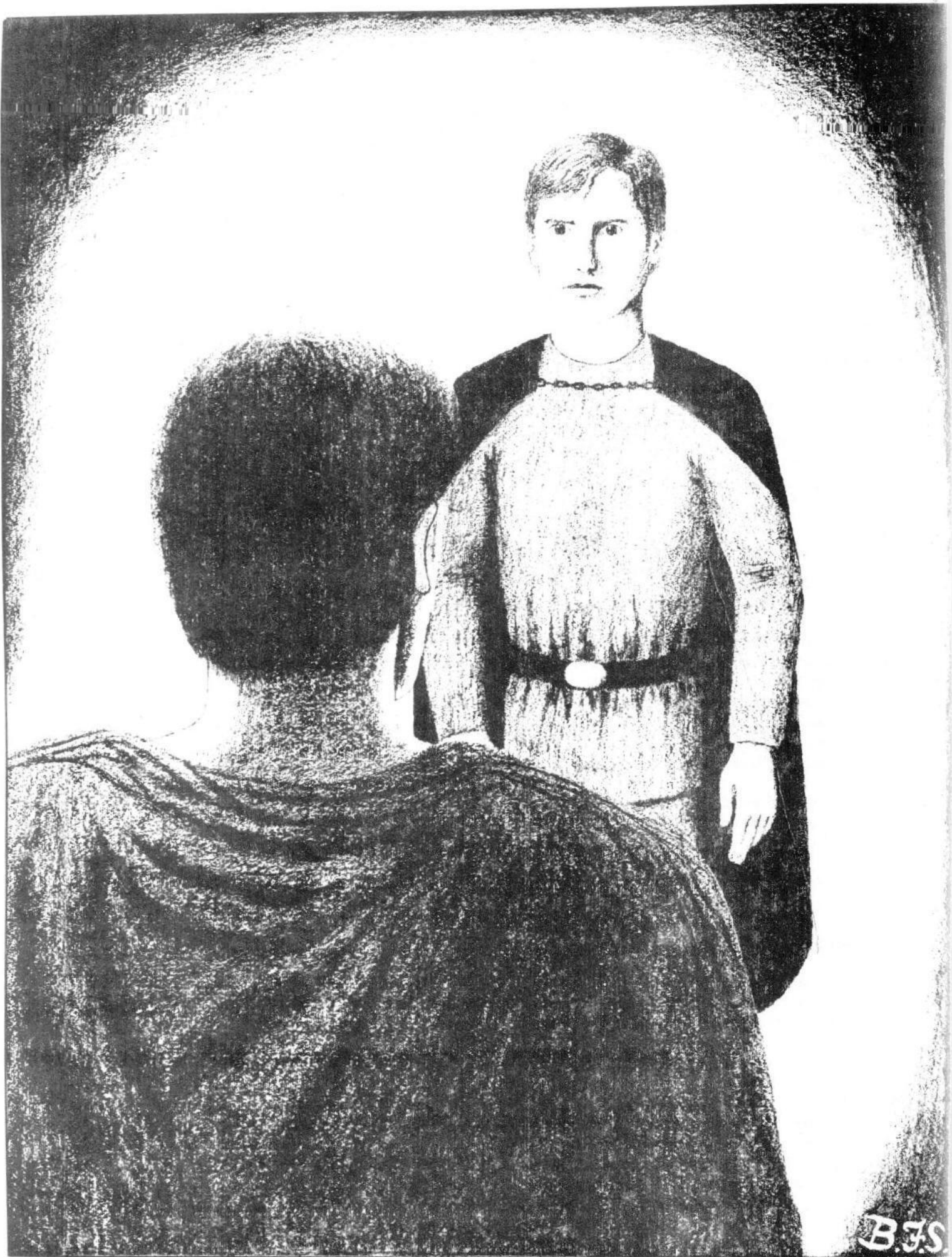
He makes it too easy for me, the older man told himself regretfully. He lets his anger rule him. Oh well...a hot temper is a failing that runs in his family.

At last, as if tired of toying with his young opponent, the tall warrior gave a deceptively easy looking flick of his wrist, and the younger man's sabre flew from his grasp, the deadman switch cutting off the forcebeam as the weapon slid harmlessly across the floor and into a corner of the room.

"Surrender," the older man said, in a deep calm voice. "The rebellion is over, and our side has won. The time for killing is past. We need to put aside our differences and work together to heal the deep wounds this war has caused."

"How can you expect me to join you?" the young man said angrily. "You killed my father!"

The reply held a note of pain. "Yes, in battle--in a fair fight, but it gave me no pleasure. He was my friend, and if he'd remained true to the ideals of his youth, he would have understood. I hope he's found peace in the Force at last."



B.F.S.

The young man shook his head bitterly and faced his adversary with defiant courage. "I'll never surrender, so you might as well go ahead and kill me now."

The tall figure sighed. "No. Whatever happens, I'll never harm you. Listen to me, boy. You've had the Jedi training, and you're still young. You didn't choose your way--it was chosen for you. Light side or dark, you can still change the path you're on." To the youth's surprise, his opponent lowered his sabre and shut it off, casually tossing it into the corner, where it lay beside the other one. He held out his hand. "Please, I ask you again: join me! In peace...and in love!"

The young man drew back in horror. "No! I'm the son of Luke Skywalker, the grandson of Darth Vader, both Dark Lords of the Sith. I could never betray my own flesh and blood!"

"Do you really believe that?" the older man asked quietly. The boy nodded. "Then there's something you must know. I didn't tell you the whole truth--I never killed your father."

The youth, visibly startled, stared at him in confusion. "But you just admitted it. I don't understand..."

The taller man paused, a look of great sadness on his face. Physically in his early forties, although the calendar gave a different age, he still had the deceptively youthful looks that had always been his hallmark; but his handsome face was marked with weariness and care, and his brown hair was beginning to show streaks of gray at the temples. It was hardly surprising, considering what he'd been through in the past twelve years.

He felt only compassion for this young man who was about to have his life, his very system of beliefs shattered by the words that would be uttered next. For he had faced his own period of total despair; and there had been times, before he'd pulled himself out of his depression and painfully hammered out a new life for himself, when he hadn't wanted to go on. It had been twelve years ago, when he had wakened from his carbon freeze to find that nine years had passed and nothing of his old life remained: his ship destroyed in an unsuccessful rescue attempt and his partner along with it; the woman he loved married to his best friend and dead in childbirth not three-quarters of a year later; his friend captured soon afterward by Darth Vader during a surprise attack on the Alliance base and fallen to the dark side at last; and the child... her child, captured along with him to be raised in allegiance to the Empire. Nine years gone, they had told him, and yet to his aching heart, it had seemed that no more than a day had passed since that night in the holding cell on Bespin when, with Chewie gone diplomatically to sleep and Threepio shut off for the night, he and Leia had been left alone to say what they knew might be their final farewell.

The youth stood waiting for his answer, a perplexed frown on his hauntingly familiar face.



"Bail Skywalker," said Han Solo, Commander-in-Chief of the newly victorious Alliance forces, founder of the new Jedi order, and final pupil of the legendary Jedi Master, Yoda. His voice was filled with infinite grief, "I am your father."



REFLECTIONS ON A MEDALLION REFLECTED

*It's more than just a weight
Suspended on a chain.
Marion Ravenwood...
(I, too, remember the pain.)*

*Yes, five thousand dollars
Will get you out of Nepal.
Marion Ravenwood...
(For twelve years I've ignored your call.)*

*Your face is so hard,
Not a hint of a smile.
Marion Ravenwood...
(I was the child.)*

*The inscription on the medallion
May decide the worldly fate.
Marion Ravenwood...
(Can I be too late?)*

*Come back tomorrow?
But I'll have to sleep in the car.
Marion Ravenwood...
(I've come so far.)*

*The medallion cast in bronze
Could just as well be tin.
Marion Ravenwood...
(What a fool I've been!)*

*The crystal off center
In the shape of the sun...
Damn it all, Marion,
I had to come.*

Mysti Frank

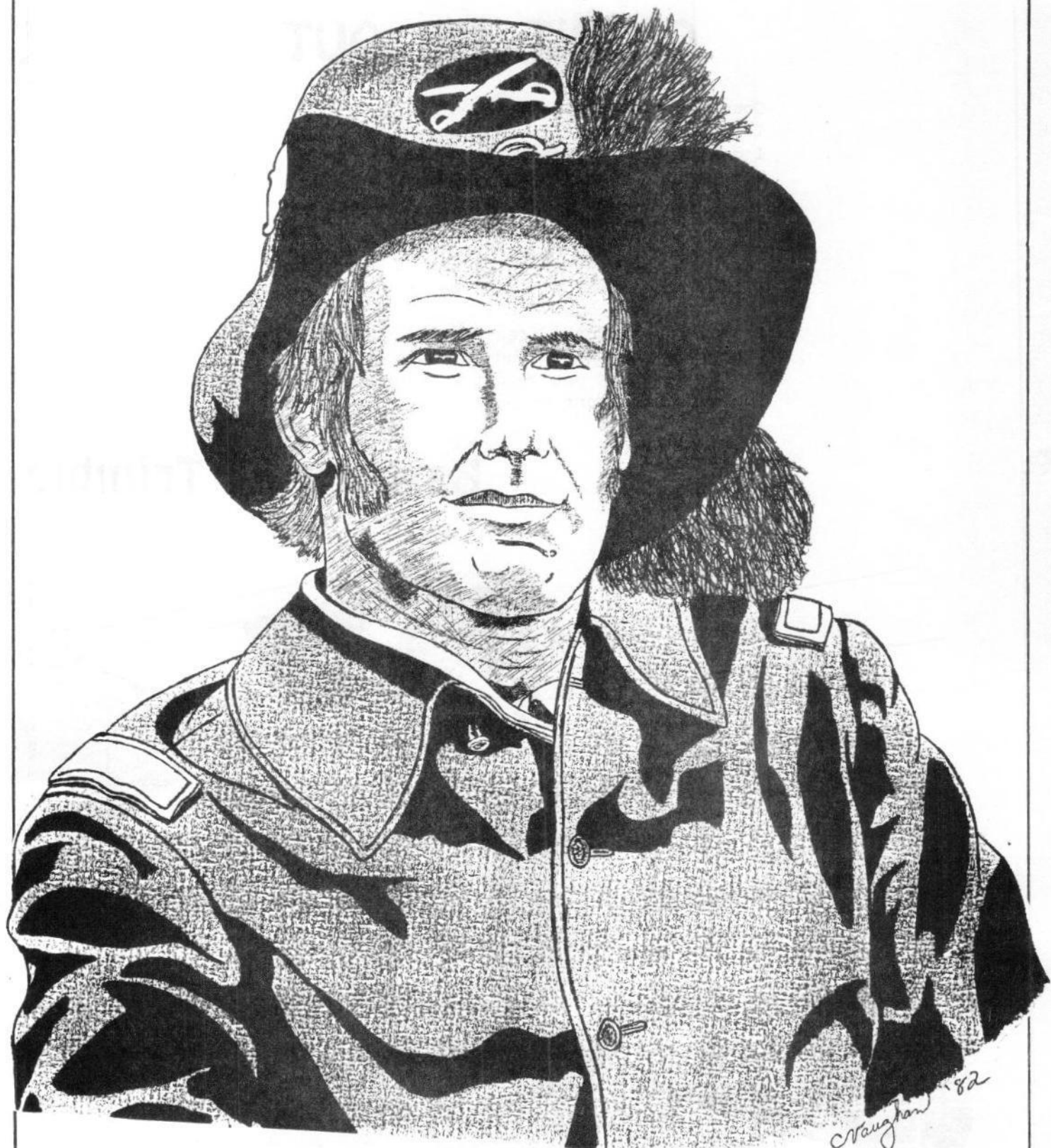
But the medallion wasn't the only reason.



BRAVE LT. SHAFFER

BRAVE LT. SHAFFER
WITH YOUR RAKISH, PLUMED CHAPEAU,
YOU STOLE MY HEART, YOU SCOUNDREL,
JUST IN CASE YOU DIDN'T KNOW.
THE MOVIE WAS A CRASHING BORE.
YOUR PART WAS INFINITESIMAL.
THE PLOT WAS PUSILANIMOUS.
THE DIALOGUE WAS DISMAL.
BUT, BRAVE LT. SHAFFER,
HOW BRILLIANTLY YOU SHONE!
IN YOUR SNUG-FITTING UNIFORM
AND LEATHER BOOTS. (OH, GROAN!)
SO TALL AND SO COMMANDING,
I WAS OVERCOME WITH LOVE.
THE WAY YOU HANDLE FIREARMS--
(OH, GASP!... SEE "GROAN" ABOVE.)
MY FREUDIAN SLIP IS SHOWING,
YOU WILL PARDON ME, I TRUST?
'TIS BUT THE PRICE I HAVE TO PAY
FOR BEING SO IN LUST.

Martie Benedict



COUNT ME OUT

Count me out, Han Solo cried
I'm not joining no revolution
I don't care how many's died
War isn't always the solution.

Just give me what's rightfully mine
And I'll be on my merry way
Far as I'm concerned, it's end of the line
Wild Banthas couldn't make me stay.

I'm an independent, free-bootin' sort of a guy
With my own special kind of route
So if you think you've got another ally
You can just count me out!

Barbara E. Trimble



THE WAY THAT IT GOES

D. C. Wickes

*We held the coastline, they held the highlands,
And they were sharp, as sharp as knives...
They heard the hum of the motors,
They counted the rotors,
And waited for us to arrive,
And we would all go down together,
We said we'd all go down together,
Yes, we would all go down together...*

A strangled cry died in Ken's throat as his body spasmed bolt upright in bed. Jenny's golden eyes, wide with alarm, met his in the dark. The cat left her nest in the tangled bedcovers around Ken's feet to stroll heavily into his lap; sprawling there, Jenny studied him more closely. One paw gently swiped at a droplet of sweat crawling down his cheek.

Ken's eyes darted sideways in the dark. Mercifully, Annie had worked late this evening and was too deep in sleep to be roused by his sudden waking. Quietly, Ken slipped from the bed, easing Jenny into the curve of Annie's body left empty by his departure. Rubbing his neck, he padded barefoot from the room.

In the kitchen, Ken turned the old-fashioned light switch and the flourescents he'd installed flared into brilliance with their customary hum. He tugged on the refrigerator door and snapped a can of Bud from the plastic-bound six-pack inside, then headed out the open back door, easing the screen soundlessly back into place behind him. A soft midsummer rain was falling and the humid night wind barely dried the perspiration his nightmare had left. With a soft grunt, Ken settled on the steps beneath the porch eaves with his beer in his hand and stared vacantly into the rain.

Later, after prowling the darkened house, Annie finally found him there. She'd half-expected he'd left for his trailer again, and relief flooded her when she peeked out the kitchen window and identified his sillouette among the shadows. Taking care to make a few small noises in the kitchen so that Ken would be aware of her approach, Annie opened the screen door and crossed the porch to sit beside him. A moment of silence passed.

"Who is Tinker?" she asked quietly.

Ken's eyes, black holes in the dark, stared at her. "You woke up," he said accusingly.



"I was hoping you'd go back to sleep. Who's Tinker?"

Ken grunted. "Chopper pilot I knew. Why?"

"You dreamt about him tonight."

"Yeah. He got lit up." Ken turned his gaze back to the rain.

"Shot down."

"Yeah. His gas tank blew. Threw the rotor...ah, forget it."

Annie moved closer to Ken and slipped an arm around him but found his body rigid as stone, refusing to acknowledge her touch. "Kenny, come back to bed," she urged softly. "We both need to get some sleep tonight. Don't forget you said you'd work on the van tomorrow before I go into town."

"Yeah, I remember," Ken nodded. "You go on in, honey. I'm gonna stay up for a while." Disengaging Annie's arm from his waist, Ken squeezed her hand

and smiled tightly. When she opened her mouth to protest, Ken placed his calloused palm over it and leaned forward to kiss her cheek.

"Go," he ordered gently. "Go on in, an' don't worry about me. I'm fine."

Annie sighed skeptically, but rose anyway. "All right." She walked to the door, hesitated, then went inside.

Ken stared bleakly into the darkness.

* * *

"Goddamn rain," Ken muttered under his breath, glaring out the bedroom window at the gray morning. The steady drizzle blurred the outline of the barn and the trees behind it, and there was no sign that it would let up soon. The van's tune-up had been necessarily postponed, but Annie still had to drive into High Point to mail her latest assignment to her publisher. Ken didn't like her driving in the rain with the engine missing as it had been. "No help for it now, Boyd," he muttered, rummaging in the top dresser drawer for a pair of socks and leaving a rumpled trail in the neatly folded underclothes. He sat down on the bed to pull the socks on, carefully avoiding the jeans and blouse Annie had laid out before taking her shower.

Annie had been very quiet that morning, and Ken had noticed the puffiness in her eyes and her surreptitious yawns. Knowing he was responsible for her sleepless night did not improve Ken's mood. He heard the shower cut off and hurriedly pulled on his Wellingtons, leaving before Annie could emerge from the bathroom. Settling his NAPA cap firmly on his head, he walked out the front door and down the porch steps toward the barn, intending to at least add oil to Annie's van before she set out. The warm rain pattered on his shirtless back and Ken growled. Normally, Jenny would accompany him on an errand such as this, but she'd taken one look out the door and declared her intention to sleep in. Ken missed her, and blamed the weather for the upset in his routine.

Yet it was not the inconvenience of the weather that really irritated Ken, but the memories it stirred, recalling winters in South Vietnam; the endless, steady rainfall that had left the air just this oppressively warm and humid, as it had been since the rain had begun several days earlier. Ken wiggled his toes in his boots and remembered a time when dry socks had been of unimaginable rarity and value. The watersoaked ground gave softly beneath his feet and released a pungent odor which evoked the stifling scent of the jungle he'd once been accustomed to. A chill shuddered through Ken in the embracing warmth, and he hurried on toward the barn. Even there, though, the musty odors of horses and damp straw reinforced his unwelcome memories, conjuring up villages he and his squad had searched and, on occasion, destroyed. Ken fought the tight feeling building in his stomach and, snatching a can of Valvoline from the shelves against the wall, fled the unsettling atmosphere for the rainy outdoors.

His long legs carried him rapidly across the yard to the van. Ken fumbled for the release and popped the hood open. Kneeling, he placed the prongs of the oil funnel against the lip of the can and pushed down firmly, then rose and tipped the spout into the appropriate opening. The heavy golden liquid gurgled slowly out, mesmerizing Ken with its fluid motion, and he did not notice Annie coming up behind him until her hand came to rest gently on his shoulder.

Instinctively, he stepped quickly away, immediately regretted the action, and concentrated on his task in order to avoid her eyes.

"How's it look?" Annie asked with forced brightness.

Ken slammed the hood down and wiped his hands. "It'll be okay. Just watch it makin' your turn onto the highway--don't trust it until I can change those plugs."

"Don't worry, I'll be careful," Annie replied. She climbed in, shook the rain from her hair and looked down at Ken, concern on her face. "I won't be long..."

"I know," Ken cut her off. "I'll see ya later." Shutting the door firmly, he gathered up the empty oil can and spout and walked rapidly away, cursing himself as he did so. Though he did not look back, he could feel Annie's eyes follow him through the rain and see the worry in them. The van's engine kicked into life as he reached the porch, and Ken turned in time to see it disappear around the curve in the driveway. Remorse rose through the anger he'd fought all morning, and Ken felt his warring emotions turn his belly to rock.

* * *

The sky was darker, the rainfall heavier that afternoon when Annie returned home, but she could see no lights in the windows of the house. Cutting the van's engine, which favored her with a shaky rattle to remind her that it needed attention, Annie slipped from the driver's seat and headed for the porch at a trot through the downpour.

The front door was unlocked, but an ominous stillness greeted her as she stepped inside and she knew at once that the house was empty. "Damn," she whispered softly, "oh, damn." Dropping her things on the hall chair, she headed for the bedroom and flicked the light on. Her eyes darted to the dresser top, where Ken's keys and wallet usually resided. They were not there, and the linen covering the dresser was rumpled as if they had been grabbed in haste.

Annie sat down heavily on the bed and stared at the evidence of Ken's departure, drained of emotion. Even when a sleepy Jenny emerged from the basket of laundry in the bathroom and leapt up onto the bed, Annie took no notice of her. The tabby, puzzled, insinuated herself into Annie's lap and looked up into her face. "Meow?" she questioned. Mechanically, Annie gathered her up and headed for the kitchen.

* * *

The rain had stopped during the night, and Ken woke to see bright morning sun streaming in the eastern windows of his trailer. A warm breeze slipped through the curtains, causing the tiny flag on the tabletop to stir. Ken blinked groggily, resenting the morning's cheerful intrusion. He pulled the sheet over his head, but his flailing hand upset the half-full Budweiser on the shelf above the bed, dousing both Ken and his bedclothes in warm, sour-smelling liquid.

"Dammit!" he swore, rising swiftly and striking his knee on a corner of the table. Recoiling, he careened into the kitchen and struck the refrigerator door sharply with his elbow. "Shit!" The bathroom doorknob clipped his hip as he headed for the tiny washbasin. Growling, Ken splashed lukewarm water on his face and groped blindly for the musty towel on the back of the door. Unrefreshed

he left the bathroom and skidded in the slowly-spreading puddle on the trailer floor. Ken owned no mop and a quick search of the trailer revealed neither paper towels or tissues. Finally, he grabbed his shirt, dropped it into the puddle and half-heartedly pushed it about with his bare foot. The cotton absorbed most of the spillage and Ken carried the soggy, foul-smelling mess to the kitchen sink and dropped it in. He turned the water on and rinsed the shirt out, draped it over the countertop to dry and sat down on his rumpled bed, glumly watching his bruises rise and take on color.

This place is getting to me, he thought morosely. Time to get out of here. I shouldn't have left Annie like that, without a word--bet she's worryin'. Ken felt a pang of regret, thinking of Annie. Now that time had distanced him from the foul mood that had festered within him just days before, the trailer seemed claustrophobic and lonely. He'd fled Annie, feeling smothered by her concern; her sensitivity to his moods had begun to seem oppressive instead of loving. Now he missed her presence with the same intensity his resentment had taken earlier in the week. "Wasn't your fault, kid," Ken apologized softly to empty air. "It's never your fault."

Suddenly he was in motion, reaching for his jeans and hastily tugging them on. He abandoned his damp shirt and grabbed blindly beneath the table for his socks and boots. Locking the trailer door on its cluttered interior, Ken walked rapidly and purposefully down the path that led through the broken place in the fence and across the ridge to Annie's house.

* * *

"Hello?...Oh, Sandy, hi. What...Of course. If you want to catch 'em, sure we can ride today. No problem...No, he won't mind. Actually, he's not here...Yes, again...No idea...Oh, please come. I'll even bribe you and bake... What else?...Okay. See you then. Bye."

Annie hung up the telephone, relieved. It would be worth having to deal with Sandy's questions to have someone else in the house for a while. Light-hearted for the first time in days, Annie headed for the kitchen with Jenny in hot pursuit. Once there, she began rummaging through her cabinets; the cat took careful inventory as flour, sugar, salt and other ingredients lined up on the countertop. As Annie began the ritual by striking a match and lighting the gas oven, she wondered how she must look to Sandy.

She smiled wryly. Even though Sandy dearly loved her cousin, it was difficult for her to understand Annie's patience with Ken's disappearances. It was no easier for Annie to explain, either to Sandy or to herself. She'd learned to anticipate his flights; increased drinking, more frequent nightmares and loss of appetite were danger signals she'd come to recognize. But she still did not know what triggered his distress, and defusing it had proven beyond her capabilities. Annie told herself she worried needlessly, as Ken had always returned after a day or two without injury or reference to his absence. Needless or not, though, worry nagged at her constantly while he was gone.

Opening the refrigerator, she pulled milk, butter and eggs from within. As she greased the cookie sheet, Annie's thoughts turned from the past to the future. She wondered if she and Ken would ever have one together. Despite her warnings to herself, Annie had become deeply involved with Ken. The wisdom of the

involvement was clearly doubtful, but then she'd had little choice in the matter. Her love and concern for him had not been dispelled by her common sense. Annie had traded her solitude for the chancey life she now shared with Ken. She tried not to hope for too much more.

Meanwhile, though, Annie had to admit that Ken's absence hurt. The old farmhouse lost its cozy feeling when he was gone, becoming cold and even a little frightening. She was glad that Jenny seemed to sense her mood and had stayed close by since Ken had left. She suspected the cat missed him as much as she did.

"And they say women are tempermental, Jenny," she remarked as she slid the loaded cookie sheet into the oven. "I guess you and I know better, don't we?" The cat ignored her, attention taken by the half-empty bag of chocolate chips. She sniffed curiously at the open end and pounced, scattering the chocolate and sending several pieces tumbling to the kitchen floor.

"Jenny!" Annie exclaimed, and bent to retrieve the spillage. "You're making a mess...Oh!" She jumped as a siren blasted the morning quiet. Startled, it took Annie a moment to realize that someone had tripped the burgler alarm on her van. She dashed from the kitchen to the front door and looked out. No one was in sight, but her heart began to pound when she spotted the blue and gold of Ken's NAPA cap lying in the grass near the truck's front bumper. Laughter bubbled in her as she grabbed her car keys and skipped out the door and down the front steps. Rounding the front of the van, she found Ken on his hands and knees, frantically searching through the unmown grass. Annie inserted her key in the lock behind the driver's door and switched the alarm off. In the sudden silence, she could not contain her giggles as Ken sprawled full length on the lawn, groaning.

"Jesus, Annie!" he complained to the sky, "why the burgler alarm out here in the middle of nowhere? Who in hell did you think was gonna steal your car?"

Annie sat down next to him, suddenly subdued. "I don't know," she replied. "No one, really. I just get nervous when you...when I'm here alone. That's all." She picked a blade of grass and tied a knot in it. "What were you doing, anyway?"

Ken sat up. "I was gonna change out those plugs for you. It was s'posed to be a surprise."

"Well, it was," she giggled. "For you, anyway."

"That's sure the truth," Ken agreed. "You and your San Francisco paranoia. I think I threw my keys into the next county," he added ruefully, searching the grass with his eyes.

"I'd stay here and help you find them, but Sandy's coming out today and I've got to finish getting ready," Annie apologized. "I've got cookies in the oven and---"

"Cookies?" Ken interrupted, getting to his feet and helping her up.

Annie nodded, glanced at her watch and gasped. "Oh, no!" She headed for the house at a run, heedless of Ken tagging after her. Bursting into the front



kitchen she tugged the oven door open with some foreboding, but found she'd returned in time; using potholders, Annie pulled the cookie sheet from the oven and set it on the countertop to cool. Ken came up behind her and slipped one arm around her waist while the other reached for a cookie.

"Kenny, they're hot!" she warned, leaning back against his chest.

"Don't care," he stated as he light-fingered one to his mouth. "'S good," was his muffled comment as he reached for another.

Annie laughed. "Leave some for your cousin, Ken," she admonished him.

"Aw, you can always bake some more," Ken hinted broadly.

"I'll have to," Annie agreed, "now that you're back...." Her eyes misted suddenly and she pushed Ken away, not looking at him. "Now get out from under-foot," she ordered as she took her mixing bowl and spoon from the drainer in the sink, "and let me get to work."

Unexpectedly, though, Ken reached out and pulled her close. He hugged her fiercely, burying his face in her hair. "Annie, I'm sorry," he murmured. "I'm so sorry..."

Annie sighed and returned his embrace. "I know, Kenny," she said softly, "It's all right."

I guess that's the way it goes,
The way that it goes,
And nobody knows what compels her.
She's seen my highs and lows
And never let go--
And when the world has turned its back on me
I don't have to feel alone
'Cause I know she cares....

"Goodnight Saigon" by Billy Joel from THE NYLON CURTAIN, ©1982.
"She Cares" by Styx from PARADISE THEATER, ©1980.



"JONES, YOU'VE GOT TO DO
SOMETHING ABOUT THIS
RING-AROUND THE
COLLAR!"

CORELLIAN PIRATE

Beneath his battered freighter
the Coreellian pirate waits.
Tall and lean, he lounges
against the landing gear of his ship.
His air is one of casual indifference.
But the hazel eyes are watchful
And a coiled spring of inner tenseness
and a tied-down blaster
belie his constant readiness.

When the expected caller arrives,
the Coreellian's cool eyes
appraise him in a glance.
Humanoid, with a faint
bluish tinge to his skin.
There are still traces
of webs between
the clawlike digits of his hands.
He's short and squat and ugly
and he wears
a wicked-looking blaster
with a wicked-looking grin
that says he knows how
to use it well.

Unconcerned, the Coreellian pirate
crosses the deserted landing field.
His lithe movements
and smooth swinging stride
betraying the fact that he is
a man who craves excitement.
A man of action.
Greetings are exchanged.
The Coreellian smiles.
A smile not meant to reassure.

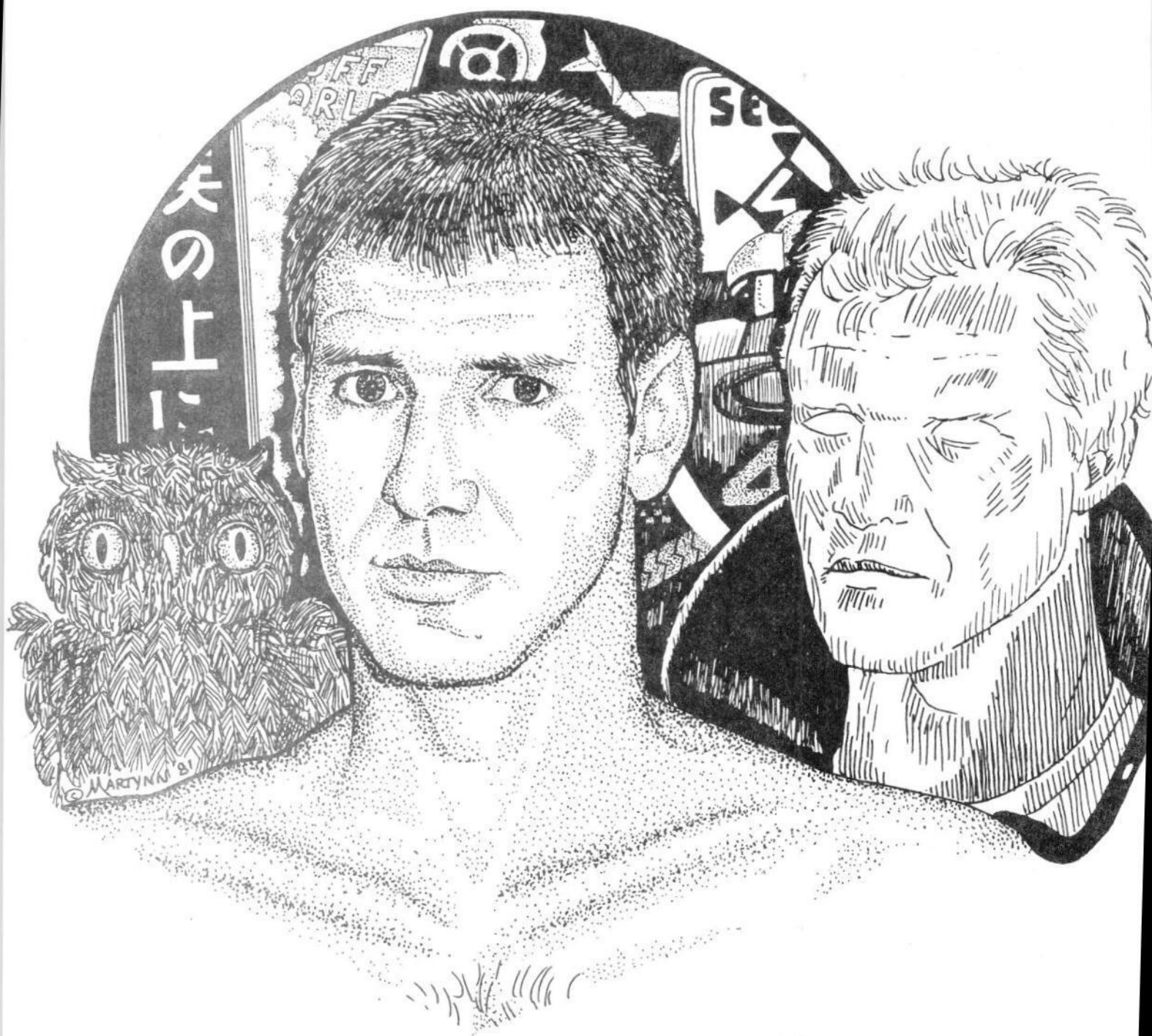
The bargaining is brief.
The azure humanoid is first quiet,
then excited, then gesticulating wildly.
Hands resting on his belt
the Coreellian is almost insolently calm.
His replies sharpened
by his sarcastic wit.
His smile just a shade wider.
The caller makes a gesture of finality.
The Coreellian's smile disappears.
The hazel eyes harden.
He shrugs and turns away.

The humanoid is fast,
but not too smart.
The Coreellian is already
turning, diving, rolling.
His blaster appearing
as if by magic in his hand.
The quiet morning is filled
with angry red beams of death.
And when silence reigns again,
It is the pirate who still stands.

He nudges his dead visitor
with his toe.
His smile gone,
his eyes unfathomable.
He holsters his blaster
and turns back to his ship.
It's been another unprofitable run.
Maybe on the next world
he'll find a buyer
A little smarter than this one.



Karin L. Zygowicz



Devolution

Incept date: 1981, or thereabouts.
Unto us a child is born,
Heir to all the slings and arrows.
It was a hungry time for babies
Even then, as I recall--
Everybody worked so goddamn hard
Just to pay the rent
And maybe eat out at McDonalds once a week.
Precious little time to spare
For hugging precious little babies.
No time for playing baseball in the parks
That got turned into parking lots
And then into skyscrapers.
The kids grew up like weeds
In the concrete-neon gardens of the City.
And they explored the caverns
Of the recreation centers,
Dark, and filled with laser-zap and whine.
Their eyes became extensions of the
Flashing game computers.
Precious little ones,
All wired to their machines.
Did Pac-Man have a heart, I wonder?
And all the while
We worked so hard, so goddamn hard,
To build this city up around them--
A legacy for future generations.
This is what we gave them,
While their backs were turned.
Watch them there.
But who are they, these not-quite humans?
Wired hearts and wired fingers.
Are they men who've lost their souls?
Or souls who burn
For want of manhood?
Watch them carefully
And cry
For the pain of emptiness.
Or maybe you would rather
Watch the owl?

Martie Benedict



Untitled Ballad
For
"HANOVER STREET"

Midnight, all alone and it's midnight
Has the night lost it's magic
I am sleeping alone
In the moonlight the faded dreams come back to my mind
And the tears begin to form

Dreaming, by myself in this twilight
I can smile at those old times
She was beautiful then
I remember what then I knew true happiness was
From my memory, dream again

Every flight I risk my life in fatalistic yearning
Now it's late night and the hours go slowly
And then I face the morning

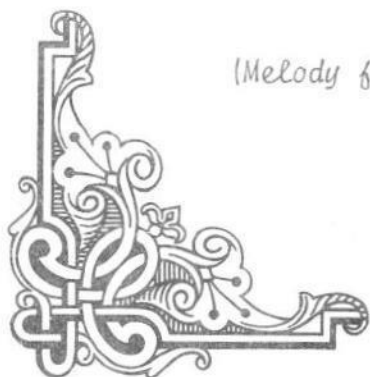
Sunrise, I must fly in the morning
I can't think of the old life
Or I know I'll give in
When the dawn breaks, my dreams of her are memories then
And with daylight so it ends

So each night I live again those days we shared together
But it's over, and she is his now, and we must part forever

Hold tight, Oh my love when we held close
Now, alone with those moments
Of our love in the rain
When I held you I had the only love I will know
But this dream ends with the dawn

-- SARA FENSTERER

(Melody from the song "Memory" by Andrew Lloyd Webber from
the London musical "CATS")



RENDEZVOUS

Ruth Radecki

Pheris was a small planet, inhabited by less than two thousand people. Most of the population was centered in one nameless city. The planet was able to survive because of what lay beneath its surface: a chalky, black ore called coline. Coline was the main fuel for thousands of developing societies. Pheris was not the only source of the ore, but it was a main one. The majority of the inhabitants worked in the mines, while the remaining handful ran shops, cantinas, and other "pleasure spots" for the constant flow of entrepreneurs that passed through the city.

But not everyone came for a load of coline. Pheris had become an occasional rendezvous point for Rebel agents because of its remoteness and its apparent immunity to Imperial interference. A rendezvous was scheduled to take place on this dry, arid day--but Han Solo was going to experience a rendezvous that was anything but ordinary.

"That's funny," Han muttered as he studied the *Millennium Falcon's* normally trustworthy scanner.

Chewbacca looked up from his own work and inquired about what was so funny.

"The scanner isn't picking up any life signs," Han told him. "Either the damn thing's on the blink--" he pounded it once with his fist, "--or else there's no one on Pheris."

Chewbacca growled his concern. The apparent disappearance of nearly two thousand people, especially from a planet as profitable as Pheris, was certainly not your ordinary everyday occurrence.

Han raised his eyes from the scanner and looked at the small planet as they approached it. Soon its glow was filling the cockpit, bathing him and Chewbacca in a pleasant golden light. From space it still looked relatively peaceful. So where had all the people gone?

"We'd better check this out, Chewie," Han suddenly said.

After a moment, Chewbacca agreed. They could test the air before they even left the ship, and if there was some plague floating around, that would be the end of it. But it was doubtful that they would be encountering some disease; would the population have left their homes lock, stock, and barrel to spread something through the galaxy? No, of course not. That ruled out a sudden planet-wide illness.

So what was left? A handful of logical reasons--and thousands of preposterous ones.

Except for the *Millennium Falcon*, the docking bays of Pheris were empty. Well, not exactly empty. There were trays of tools lying around, as well as deactivated service droids, but no ships--and no people.

Han drew back from the door of the last docking bay. The grip that he was holding his blaster in had suddenly become vaguely sweaty. There was something unnerving about the whole situation. It was so damn quiet!

Behind Han, Chewbacca lowered his bowcaster. The overwhelming silence was getting to him, too. To him, silence meant death. He wanted to turn around and leave right away, but his captain had other ideas.

"Let's check the town now," Han suggested, already heading down the dusty street that led to the center of the town.

The center of town, quaintly known as the "town triangle," was a long-dry fountain faced on three sides by the various businesses that the Pherisians had set up to take advantage of the off-world traffic. The private residences were spread out behind these business blocks. There was not a soul to be seen, not even a sign of the Rebel supply agent that Han was supposed to meet. The only sign of life was the seemingly benign breeze that was gently blowing dust throughout the town triangle.

Han stepped onto the long wooden porch that ran in front of the nearest row of businesses. The wood creaked under his feet, adding to the eeriness around him.

"Try the other side," he said to Chewbacca, gesturing toward the opposite row of businesses with his blaster.

Chewbacca immediately shook his head. This was no time for them to go off on their own separate ways, even if there was no apparent danger. There truly was safety in numbers, and he told Han that, in this case, two was better than one.

Han could not help but smile when he heard this. He may have been a fiercely independent free spirit, but Chewbacca always insisted on looking after him. Sometimes he may have reacted as if he resented being mothered, but there were other times when he felt just a bit more secure with his devoted Wookiee friend looking over his shoulder.

"All right, Chewie, all right," Han relented.

They proceeded onward, stopping every so often to look through the windows and doors along the row. The various establishments were devoid of people, but they still began to put together a fragmentary story. Everywhere tables and chairs were overturned, and glass display cases were smashed--but their contents were still there, scattered across the floor. Some walls appeared to be scorched, as if they had been hit by blaster fire.

They finished that row and continued on to the next one, which branched off at a sixty-degree angle. The first two businesses were in the same condition as the ones before, as if some sort of struggle had taken place.

The third door led them into a large room, which had served as the town's all-purpose meeting hall. There was a podium at the rear of the room, facing

front, and it was remarkably untouched. Its upright form was the only point of order in the room. The wooden benches for the audience were overturned, leaning against the walls, or simply smashed into pieces. Scorches similar to the ones they had seen previously laced the walls, looking like hideously charred flowers.

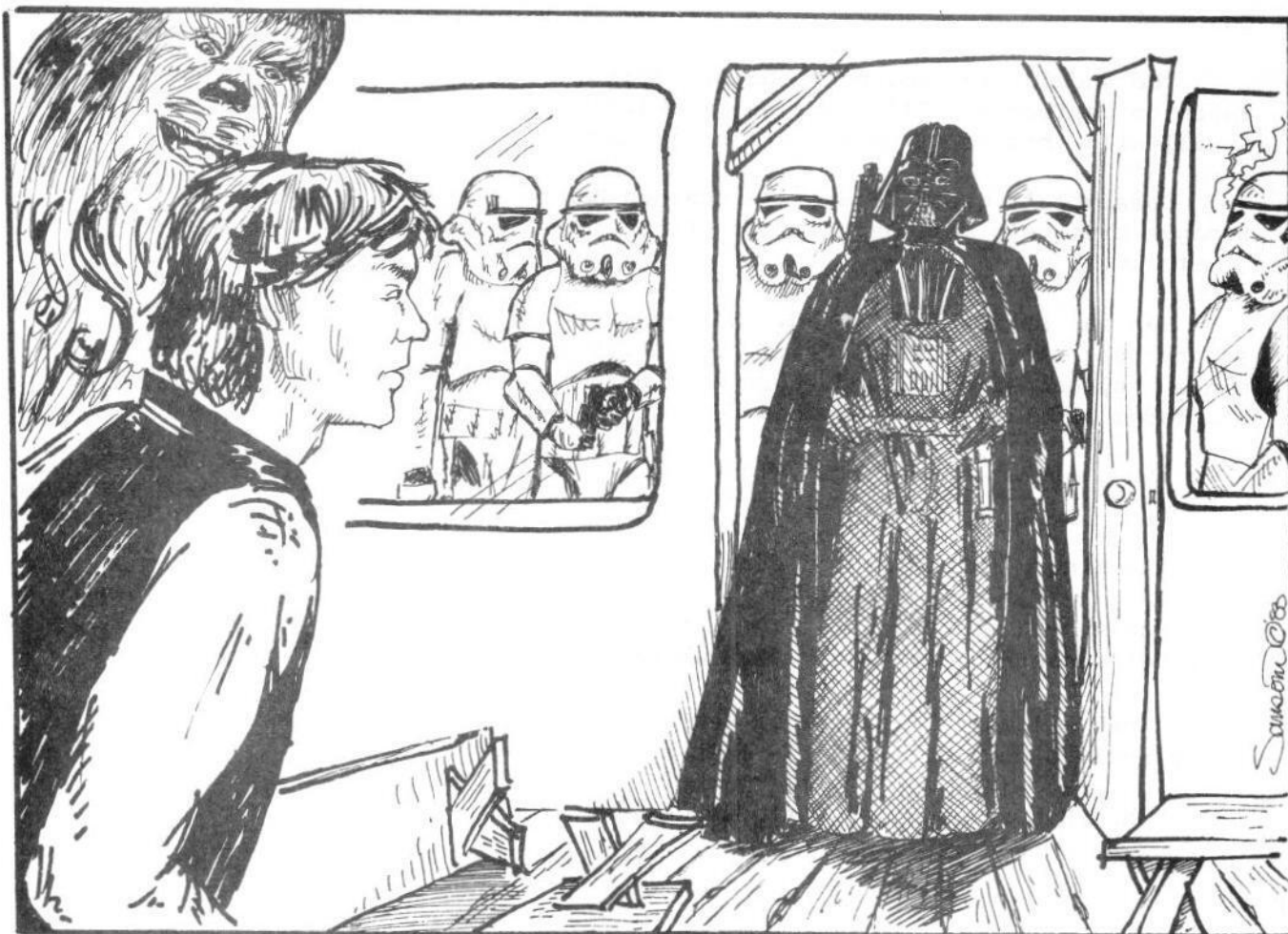
The absence of life had bothered Han from the very beginning, and now the bad feeling within him exploded into a full-blown case of paranoia. He could not afford to be paranoid very often, but when he was, he was paranoid to the extreme.

"Something's not right here, Chewie," he said. "Let's get the hell outta here and let someone else figure this out."

He turned around to leave--and instantly froze, feeling like he was rooted to the floor. There was someone else on Pheris, but it was not someone he had anticipated meeting, or wanted to meet for that matter. It was Darth Vader.

Vader was standing just beyond the threshold, and he was not alone. Through the windows Han could see a squadron of stormtroopers, ten or fifteen of them, their white armor glistening mockingly in the sun. They could not be stuck in a tighter trap.

Chewbacca had also perceived the severity of their situation, and he let Han know by howling loudly. But he did not try anything with his bowcaster, because he knew the effort would be futile.



Han, however, succumbed to his gunslinger's instincts. He raised his blaster so fast that the movement was blurred, and he fired at Vader. The shots were easily deflected by Vader, adding fresh blossoms to the already-scarred walls.

Then some unseen power wrenched the blaster out of Han's hand, almost breaking his trigger finger in the process. Han looked down at his now-empty palm in shock, then up at Vader, who was now holding the blaster in one hand.

"I'm truly disappointed in you, Captain Solo," Vader rasped. "Haven't you tried that once before?"

Han simply glared back at him, all the while trying to formulate a way out of this mess. He was not coming up with any viable solutions that ended with himself alive.

Vader raised his hand and made a beckoning motion. A stormtrooper stepped out of the ranks and came to his side.

"Yes, sir?" the trooper inquired.

Vader handed Han's blaster to the trooper and commanded, "Take the Wookiee outside and guard him. Choose two other men to stay with you, and send the rest back to the ship."

"Yes, sir," the trooper repeated, glancing at Chewbacca. Even though his helmet hid his features, it was quite obvious that his glance was a fearful one.

"He should give you no problem, Sergeant," Vader said, reading the trooper's reaction perfectly. "I'm sure he is aware that if he gives you any trouble, I will allow him to watch me as I break Captain Solo's neck."

Chewbacca's great blue eyes regarded Han with concern, and as the stormtrooper brusquely motioned him out of the room, the despondent Wookiee howled balefully.

Han was strangely unmoved. He had something else on his mind. Their scanner had shown no signs of life...but they had not heard any ships land since they had arrived, and there were no ships in the docking bays. So how had Vader and his troops avoided detection?

"No people," he muttered, looking down at the floor. "No ships. And the scanner--"

"Machinery can be manipulated as easily as the human mind," Vader rumbled.

Han's head snapped up at the interruption; he had not been completely aware of wondering out loud. "But where are the people?" he blurted.

"They are always in need of new workers in the spice mines of Kessel," Vader replied coolly. "And there is room for one more."

"Oh?" Han sneered, his natural defiance returning splendidly.

"Just give me what I want, and Kessel will no longer be any concern of yours."

"And what could I possibly have that you want?"

Vader seemed to narrow his eyes as he spoke one solitary word: "Skywalker."

Ice water seemed to rush into Han's veins, chilling him from head to toe. The coldness centered right in his heart. Turn Luke over to the human race's greatest enemy? The idea was unthinkable! He would sooner be a slave in the spice mines than be a party to Luke's destruction.

"When's the next shuttle to Kessel?" was his reply.

"Come now, Captain," Vader said, beginning to advance on Han. "You are most definitely a mercenary, and mercenaries care about no one but themselves. Why should you throw your life away for Skywalker?"

Han had tried to stand his ground as Vader approached, step by gigantic step, but the Dark Lord's imposing form eventually got the best of him, and he began backing away. His mind had come to a complete stop. He felt desperately lost.

Soon his body also came to a complete stop, because he had backed into a wall. He knew that this was it--he was trapped. But he remained steadfast in his refusal to tell Vader anything, and he communicated this idea to Vader through his defiant glare and his stubbornly closed mouth.

Vader continued to approach, finally stopping when he and Han were toe-to-toe. He towered over Han like some malevolent shadow. For a few moments the only sound in the room was his respirator, pumping oxygen to his seared lungs.

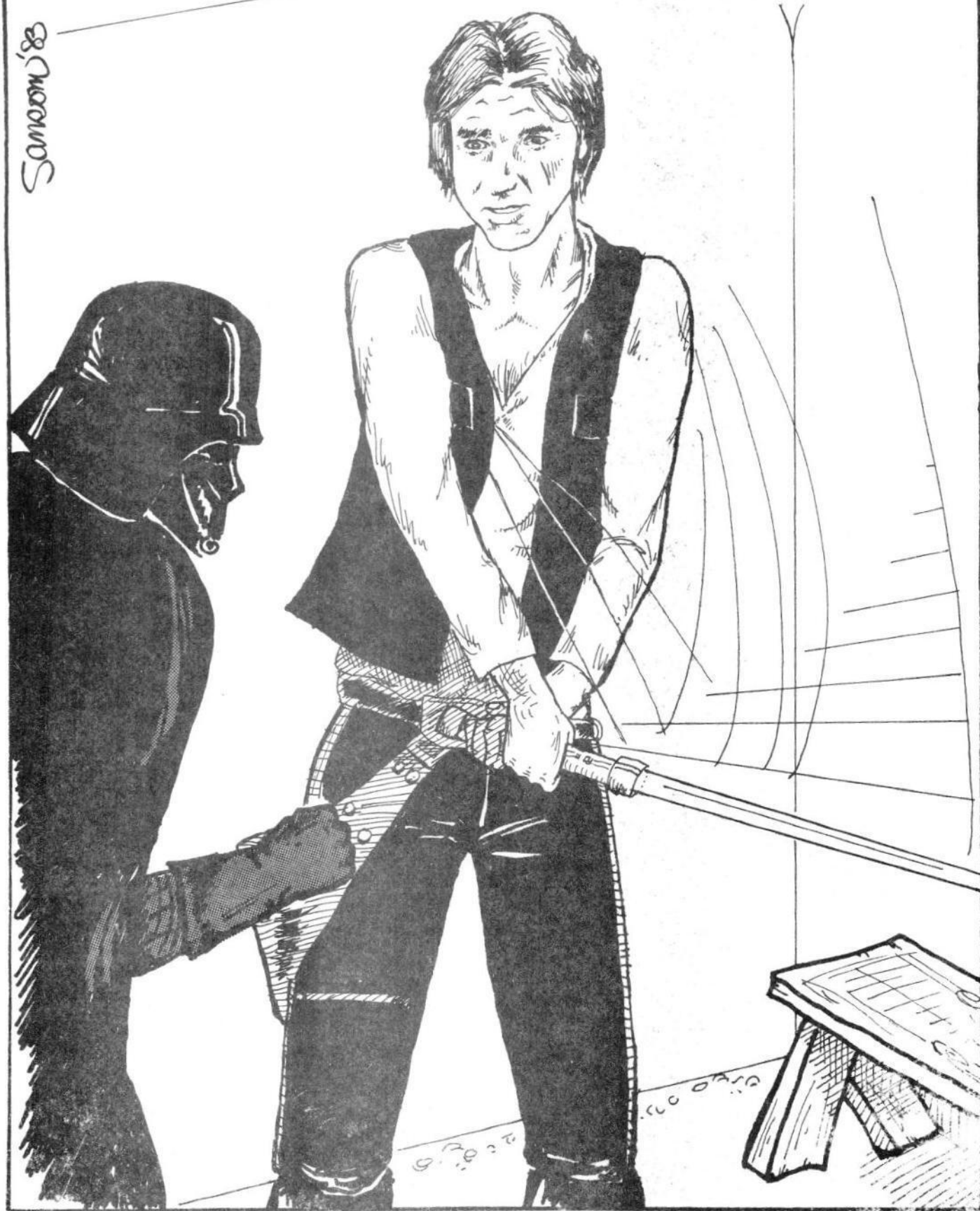
"No more words, Solo?" Vader finally intoned. "That's very uncharacteristic of you."

There was nothing more to say. Han had made his decision; Luke was his friend, and that was that. Nothing more, nothing less. Mercenaries were not supposed to have feelings, but Han had developed emotionally to a great extent during his stint with the Rebellion. He had developed, matured, mellowed... maybe even aged. He was not sure if he was really a mercenary anymore. Maybe he was just a man, a man who had learned to love and be loved and would do anything to keep that precious feeling alive, even if it meant death. Then the feeling would survive in those around him, to be passed on to generations to come.

"What a pity," Vader said as Han remained silent. He raised a gauntleted hand and clamped it around Han's throat. "There are pleasant ways to extract information, and there are also unpleasant ways."

With apparently no effort, Vader lifted Han off the ground. Han struggled against him, but Vader only tightened his grip. Han's fingers clawed at Vader's hand, but it was like trying to unbend iron bars. He realized with a burst of panic that Vader was going to slowly choke him to death. Already his vision was blurring, and when Vader spoke again, his words were nothing but a meaningless muddle.

Sanborn '88



Despite Han's degenerating condition, a glimmer of insight managed to spark in his mind. He wanted to make Vader experience what he was feeling. He dropped his arms as if he was about to lose consciousness--and then slammed his open hand against Vader's chest. His blow depressed the four switches at the bottom of the control panel situation there, cutting off the respirator within Vader's suit.

With a strangled gasp, Vader immediately dropped Han to the ground and began fumbling to reengage the respirator in a horrifyingly ludicrous spectacle.

Han was down on the floor on his hands and knees. He was still a little groggy from the chokehold, but he knew that he would have to act fast in order to save his life. He struggled to his feet, yanked the lightsaber off Vader's belt, and activated its fiery red blade. It felt that it weighed a thousand pounds as he hefted it over his shoulder. Then he swung it at Vader in a wavering horizontal arc. But his swing was weak, and only the tip of the blade made any contact, slicing through the control panel on Vader's chest. Sparks flew everywhere, forcing Han to shield his eyes with his hand. Then Vader toppled like a mighty tree.

Running footsteps approached the room, causing Han to whirl around while holding the lightsaber in a defensive position. A stormtrooper dashed through the door. He took one look at his fallen leader and brought his rifle up to fire at Han. Almost without thinking, Han cocked the lightsaber at the proper angle to absorb the shot.

This display apparently spooked the stormtrooper, because he turned around and ran out. His departure was immediately followed by startled shouts, a roar from Chewbacca, and a peculiar muffled noise that sounded as if two stormtroopers had banged into each other with tremendous force.

Han shut off the lightsaber and raced out the door. He had not bothered to take another swipe at Vader, who he believed would not live much longer without a respirator. Besides, he really could not afford to lose any more time. There was an Imperial Star Destroyer waiting for them somewhere above the surface of Pheris. The sooner they left, the better.

What Han did not stop to consider was that the Empire prized Darth Vader very highly, and they could not let his fate lie in the figurative hands of one respirator. All sorts of things could cause it to malfunction: an accident, a mechanical defect, etc. They did not relish the idea of their most valuable and influential agent dying as the result of a faulty connection, so they took the appropriate measures to assure his survival. Han never heard the auxiliary respirator as it slowly began to pump fresh air into Vader's decimated lungs.

Outside, Han was met with an interesting sight. Two stormtroopers were now nothing but crumpled heaps near the fountain, apparently the victims of Chewbacca's great hands. The third trooper was nowhere to be seen. He was probably so scared that he would be hiding in that ghost town for days.

Han ran across the town triangle to where the troopers lay. He found his blaster lying on the ground between them, and when he snatched it up, he began to feel more secure.

Chewbacca had already retrieved his bowcaster from the fallen troopers, and he barked a short question to Han, asking about what had transpired between him and Vader.

"I'll tell you all about it as soon as we're out of this system and in hyperspace!" Han shouted over his shoulder, already sprinting in the direction of the docking bays.

As Chewbacca ran after Han, he knew that he was going to hear quite a story. The developing bruises on Han's neck told him that much. So did the lightsaber. He assumed that the only way Han could have gotten the saber away from Vader was to have killed him. So, Chewbacca believed, his premonition had been correct; there had been death in the air. He had never suspected that it would be Darth Vader's.

* * *

"There it is," Han said as he spotted the massive Star Destroyer. "It must've been hiding on the other side of Pheris when we came in."

He took a long, hard look at the gigantic ship. He could not have avoided spotting it in the first place because it was so damn big. Despite its massive size, it was strangely devoid of activity. No TIE fighters, no barrages from gun turrets, no defensive action at all.

Han twisted around in his seat so that he could reach the navi-computer, and he programmed the coordinates of the Rebel base into it. "Okay, Chewie, the navi-'puter is all set," he said. "Are you--"

Chewbacca cut him off with a yelp of surprise, and he pointed out the cockpit with a long, hairy finger.

Han looked back at the Star Destroyer, what Chewbacca was pointing at, and what he saw almost made his heart skip a beat. Squadrons of TIE fighters were swarming out of the Imperial ship, looking like lethal offspring from an equally dangerous parent.

"Just when I thought they were going to make it easy for me," Han remarked irritably as he engaged the hyperdrive system.

By the time the TIE fighters reached firing range, the *Millennium Falcon* was long gone, nestled in that mysterious void known as hyperspace.

* * *

As Han strolled down a corridor within the Rebel base, he looked down at the lightsaber in his hand. He had to admit that it was quite a prize. The kid would probably blow a gasket when he saw it.

Han rounded a corner and arrived at his destination: the base's main briefing room. It was the place that all the pilots came to every day to get their assignments. Luke was at the rear of the room, diagramming an attack pattern on the chalkboard that dominated the back wall. It was a primitive means of communication, but there were times when it was a lot more convenient than using computers.

When he heard footsteps behind him, Luke quickly glanced over his shoulder. "Oh, Han, it's you," he said, returning to his sketch. "You're back a little early, aren't you?"

"Yeah," Han agreed, sauntering across the room in his characteristic manner until he was within arm's-length of Luke. "I ran into a little trouble."

"Oh?" Luke turned around completely, and almost immediately a shocked expression appeared on his face. "What happened to you? It looks like someone tried to throttle you."

Han figured that the lightsaber would make a greater impression than any description he could give, so he wordlessly handed the saber to Luke.

Luke investigated the saber with confused eyes. Then he pointed it away from himself and Han and activated it. When he saw the color of its blade, he paled considerably.

"How did you get this?" he whispered.

Han gave him a quick account of the events that had occurred on Pheris, without omitting or embellishing anything. Luke was too perceptive to let him get away with that anymore.

"So Vader's dead?" Luke asked.

"I would think so," Han replied. "How long could he live without that respirator?"

A new, unreadable expression crossed Luke's face. "I'm not so sure," he stated flatly. "Vader's unbeatable."

"Don't tell me that you can feel that he's still alive!"

"I didn't say that. I just can't believe that he could be defeated so easily."

"Easy?" Han scoffed. "What was so damn easy about it?"

"I didn't mean it that way," Luke corrected himself, sounding just the slightest bit annoyed. "I meant--"

"I know what you meant," Han interrupted with a sudden smile.

Luke looked down at the lightsaber again, and he turned it over in his hands a couple times as if to assure himself that he was really holding it. "You know, Han," he said, "if Vader really did survive, you're suddenly going to be more important to him. He's going to be after you for you now. You're not just a gateway to me anymore."

"Yeah, well, I did what I had to do," Han replied with a shrug.

"I wonder how he knew you were coming," Luke mused curiously.

"I don't know. He had his ways to get the information he wanted."

Luke nodded solemnly. "We all know that."

"So do the Pherisians. Somehow, he managed to round them all up, and now they're on their way to Kessel. All because of me."

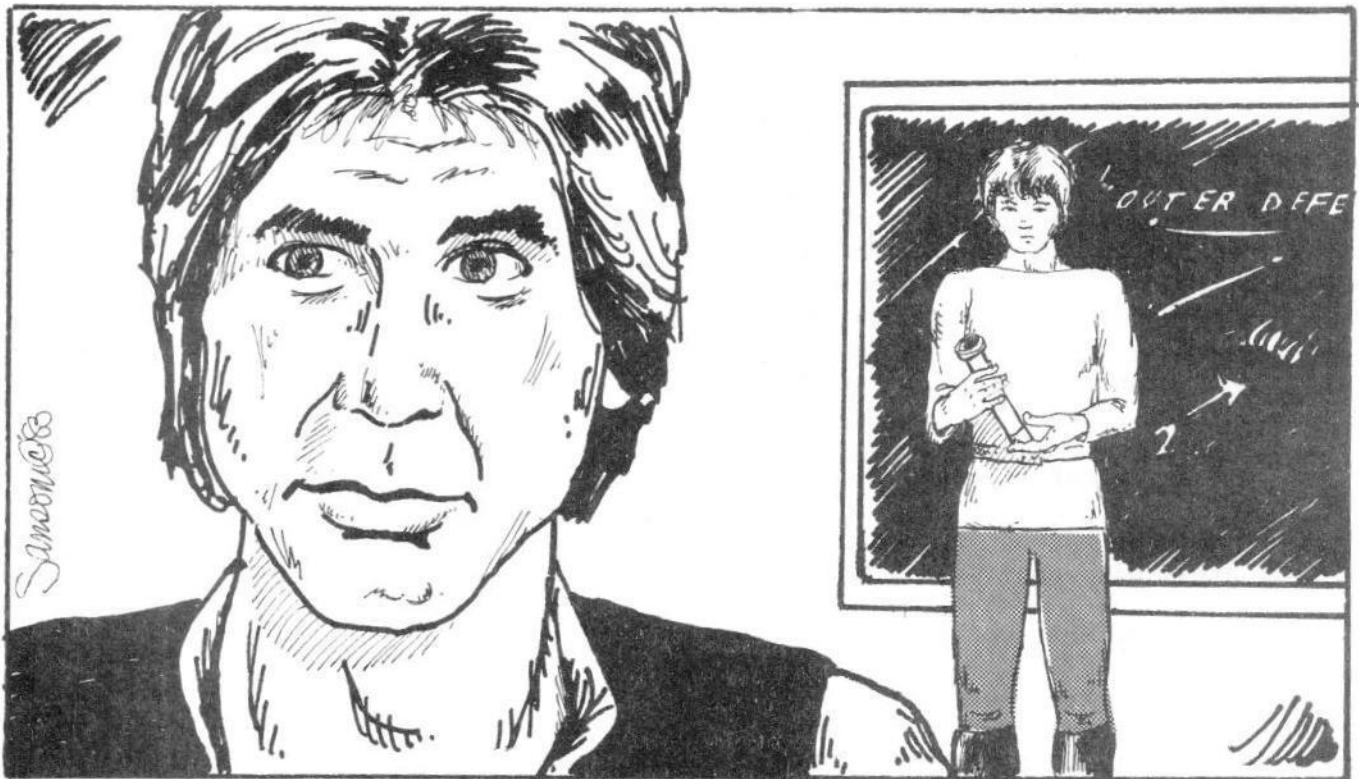
"Not just because of you, Han," Luke assured him, "but also because of me, and the Alliance as a whole."

"But is it worth it, Luke?" Han asked with a touch of despair in his voice. "I mean, is it really worth it?"

Han's question caught Luke by surprise because it was a painfully honest one, not one of his typical snide remarks. It was one that he had asked himself many times.

"Wars involve sacrifices," he stated plainly. "It sounds cruel, but it's a necessary step to victory. You should know that. After all, you seemed to be willing to die for me."

Han nodded as he realized that this was true. His experience had taught him more than one lesson. "We've both had enough experiences with Vader to know that it's something we'd never wish on each other," he said. "It's the least I could do."



"Thanks," Luke said with a refreshingly boyish smile.

"You're welcome," Han replied, returning the smile.

Voices and footsteps were approaching the room; it was time for Luke to give his scheduled briefing. Han said goodbye to him and left the room. He was intent upon reaching his quarters, and no one would be able to thwart his efforts. His body and soul were crying for sleep. It has been a long day.

CAREER APPRAISAL

A glowing future has Martin Stett;
There's a world of phones he's not tapped yet.

Corporate ladders he's yet to climb;
All it will take is a little time.

He's smart, ambitious, and ruthless, too;
Outwardly loyal, sincere, and true.

And there's a world of backs he's not stabbed yet;
Yes, a glowing future has Martin Stett



Jacqueline Taero

LONG DISTANCE

"Hello?" "Hey, Kenny, is that you?
It's me!" "Huh?" "Jungle Jack, that's who!"
"Oh, Jack--I guess you made it west.
How's Adcox, and Munroe?" "Aah, Ken,
I gotta tell you--" "Jack, I'd guessed
About Munroe already, friend."
"Shit! Why didn't you tell me, then?"
"I didn't know for certain, Jack!
Nobody told me! 'Sides, I knew
You had to follow your trip through.
How 'bout Adcox? What'd he say?"
"His wife said that he'd gone away
And she can't tell when he'll be back,
If ever. Carol talked to her;
I was asleep. Don't know for sure
Just what they said. About Munroe--
His parents really freaked, you know,
When I showed up and asked for him.
I feel bad that I hurt them."
"Hey, man--" "I freaked, too--ran away
From them, and Carol. Ran through town,
And saw the main street burning down.
I heard incoming, watched it hit
And saw the bodies fly. Dammit!
Ken, I thought I was back in 'Nam!
Paid no attention where I ran,
I was so scared, so out of it.
I really thought that I was back!
I really thought so!" "Okay, Jack!
Just settle, brother, it's okay--
It's happened to me, same as you.
I've had those goddam nightmares, too."
"But, Ken!" "Jack, you don't have to say
Another thing, man. Not to me.
You ain't the only one to see
Them things again." "What can I do?"
"I don't know, buddy," "You don't see--
I gotta know! 'Cause Carol, she
Says that she wants to stay with me."
"Hey, Kenny, you still there?"
"Yeah. Hey, kid, that's fine news to hear."
"But if I'm crazy--" "Can it, Jack!
You ain't, and I ain't either!" "Ken,
You think it's safe to love her, then?
I'm so damned scared that I might crack
And hurt her somehow." "Listen, Jack,
I ain't the guy for you to ask.
But if you're askin', buddy, well,

D. C. Wickes

I gotta say I think it's swell,
 And wish the best for both you two.
 I think she'll be just fine with you.
 I ain't got much, an' I don't know
 Just what you're gonna need, and so
 The car is yours, for just as long
 As you need it. It don't belong
 To me as much as to you, man.
 Yours was the first race that it ran."
 "I don't know how to thank you, Ken,
 Or what to say...." "Just shut up, then."
 "No, that's not what I mean." "Then what?"
 "We wrecked the car. It's totalled. But
 I promise that I'll pay you back."
 "Now how in hell'd you wreck the car?"
 "Carol drove it through a bar."
 "She what?" I got jumped by these guys.
 They stole the farm funds, cracked my head
 And left me in the dark, for dead.
 I followed them into this bar
 And fought 'em for the money, see?"
 "How many, Jack?" "I took out three
 Before Carol came after me,
 Right through the front door, in your car."

"No shit!" "Kenny, I swear, it's true!"
 "I guess she is the girl for you!"
 "I'm sorry, Ken. I didn't plan--"
 "hey, it's okay. Don't sweat it, man.
 That day I gave those keys to you;
 What I said then, well, it was true.
 I didn't really want it then.
 Call it my wedding gift." "Thanks, Ken.
 I've talked to Carol. We both want
 To start the farm, like Munroe planned.
 We've got the money for the land.
 We'll build it like we dreamed of, see?
 Though it's just Carol, you and me."
 "Hey, Jack, I've given you my car.
 Don't count on me for too much more.
 Now all your wasted time is through,
 That farm, and Carol; they're for you.
 As for me, I'm doin' fine.
 This trailer and my gun are mine.
 It ain't no problem, bein' alone.
 I've done okay till now, I guess.
 Someday I'll come. There's still the phone.
 Until I see 'ya, Jack, God bless."



WHATEVER

HAPPENS...

no. 1



When Luke's looking at you and your eyes turn to me
And I know that I'm not half the man he will be,
Then I wonder just what your eyes see in my face;
Yeah, I wonder why he doesn't stand in my place.
When he gazes at you with his heart in his eyes
I just wonder if you know, if you realize
That the chances of us ever working are slim,
Compared to a life and a future with him.
When you're holding me, I think of how hard he tried,
And the look on the kid's face when he stood aside;
Girl, I wonder if you will look back and regret.
I just wonder if you really know what you'll get.
When he's walking away, I see how your eyes shine
And I know that you love me, I know that you're mine--
But I wonder if that Han will ever be true--
That strange me that I see when I'm looking at you.

M.E. Wickes

THE LODI STRAIGHT

Martie Benedict

"The name of the game, Cuz, is poker."

Tommy Lillard, ex-bank robber, slapped a deck of cards firmly down on the table before him. He rifled them expertly, flourished them with a gambler's practiced finesse and, swirling them back into their rectangular form once more, offered them to his companion.

"Cut," he suggested.

Avram Belinsky, late of Poland and most recently a resident of that lengthy *pied de terre*, The Road, paid close attention to Tommy's lazy Texas drawl and busy fingers. With a curiously child-like and equitable enthusiasm, he set about learning the rudiments of Tommy's second favorite sport.

"I should cut them?" he asked.

"Yeah, like divide them, see? Half here, half here. It's your last chance to make it hard for me to palm them cards I got stacked!" Lillard laughed to show he was only kidding.

"Don't worry, Cuz. I'm teaching, not sharpening. Now, here, we'll start out with some Five-Card Stud..."

In the doorway to the neat little parlor, Rosalee Belinsky rolled her lovely brown eyes heavenward and shook her head. Being married to a rabbi was interesting enough and full of more surprises than she had expected. Especially since her gentle husband was best of friends with a, to her at least, inscrutable cowboy possessed of a bit of a temper and a shady past.

But Tommy was diverting; a man to whom laughter came easily, and, for all his strange exploits, an honest man. Avram obviously loved him. So Rosalee would love him, too. And she was a wise and philosophical woman. Things could be a lot worse.

"...and that, Cuz," Tommy was saying, "is what's called a Lodi Straight, in these parts, at least."

Avram studied the cards Tommy had dealt him: the beginnings of a straight, plus a pair of deuces.

"See, the strength of your hand depends on the pair, and, with a pair like that," Tommy shook his head and chuckled ruefully, "you need all the help you can get!"



Avram nodded with resignation. "I never had much luck at cards," he said.

"Well, after I get through with you, you could sharp your way across the country, if you had a mind to go back." The cowboy grinned and dealt again.

Rosalee recognized Tommy's enthusiastic attempts to teach for exactly what they were: a sign of his almost urgent need to find an innocent occupation for his energies, most of which seemed generally turned in the direction of unwholesomeness.

Rosalee thought quickly. "Avram," she said with a bright smile, "when you go down to the abbey for the wine, why not take Tommy?"

"Tommy would want to go to an abbey?" The rabbi looked exceedingly skeptical. He turned to his friend, trying to see in that clean-shaven visage any hint of delight at the prospect of visiting the Sisters of Saint Teresa de Abondanza. To his surprise, Lillard was frowning assessingly.

"Well, sure, Cuz. I could go along for the ride to keep you company. That is, if you ain't going on a Saturday, cause I ain't walking, sure as hell. Pardon." The last to Rosalee who closed her eyes and nodded with the trace of a smile.

Poor Tommy, she thought. A man most definitely in transition.

"That is settled, then," said the rabbi's wife with satisfaction. "Now, I will leave you men to your cards."

As she headed toward the kitchen of her small, frame home, her husband was saying, "...and what kind of hand is this?"

"Nothing at all. Real piece of shit. Pardon..."

* * *

The Abbey of Saint Teresa de Abondanza sat like a rich oasis of verdancy among the rolling hills southeast of San Francisco Bay. Rows of well-tended grapes in arbors attested to the sisters' diligent viticulture, and the grounds surrounding the abbey proper were charmingly landscaped with many varieties of local flora, laced with stone pathways and shaded by aromatic eucalyptus trees.

While the rabbi arranged for the cases of wine to be loaded into his wagon, Tommy amused himself by wandering along the pathways in the garden. He was still bored, to be sure, but watching the sisters bustle about in their long black robes tending the vines was mildly diverting.

He was about to retrace his steps and see if Avram was ready to leave when, from behind, a voice whispered, "Hey, Tommy!"

Turning abruptly, he saw a face grinning out at him from the swathing wimple of a nun's habit. The very short sister appeared to be crouching in the concealment of the shrubbery.

"Hey, Tommy!" she repeated. "Remember me?"

"Uh..." he looked closer. The pussy-cat face grinned mischievously back at him and the nun winked in a most suggestive and impious manner.

"Well, goddam!" said Tommy, returning the grin. "Goddam if it ain't Kevie Corbin! What the hell are you...?"

He broke off as she reached out a hand and hauled him into the bushes by the priory wall.

"Shsssss!" she admonished.

"Okay, okay...Ow!" A second nun emerged from the foliage and a bony elbow nailed him in the ribs.

"Hiya, Lillard!" grinned a sister equally as unnunlike as her partner. "Remember me? I'm Lang, but I may have slipped your memory."

Tommy thought back to one very bizarre evening in the Two Rivers Palace of Pleasure Saloon. Months ago, it had been, a little vacation from attempts to live a life of propriety. There'd been an unlikely pair of saloon girls, one tall and skinny with wild yellow hair and the other a tiny brunette with the most tremendous pair of... "Kevie," Tommy smiled. "And, yeah, Lang," he nodded to the skinny one. "Well, what in hell are you two doing here, dressed up like that, for Chrissake?"

"That's a long story, Tommy," said Kevie.

"And it's sure not for Christ's sake!" Lang put in acidly. "Dammit, Kev!" She was scratching beneath her habit. "These things are hot as a crotch!"

"Shut up, Lang. Tommy, look, we...uh...we were running this little scam over in Placerville. Nothing all that bad..."

"Just taking a few miners for some loose change..."

"When we got a federal marshal on our case..."

"Otis Pitts! The dirtiest, meanest sonovabitch you ever..."

"And he's after us right now, and we got this far, but we can't hide here forever." An imploring note had crept into Kevie's voice.

"Where'd you get those outfits?" Lillard wanted to know.

Kevie and Lang exchanged a pair of sly glances. "They'll wake up in a few hours," Lang said quickly, "but the thing is, we've got to get out of here before Pitts shows up!"

"Can you help us, Tommy? We just about gave up hope when we spotted you walking along the path..."

"Kevie, here, was starting to pray, even!" Lang jumped back with a yelp as Kevie bounced on her instep.

"We're desperate, Tommy," the shorter girl said simply. "I don't know what you're doing here, but you've just got to help us get away."

The two girls peered at him hopefully. Lillard thought about it for a second, then grinned. Whatever happened, he decided, it would surely not be boring.

"Okay," he said. "Meet us outside the gates in a couple of minutes. My friend the rabbi and me are taking a load of wine back for his congregation."

"Wine?" asked Lang eagerly.

"A couple of minutes. Outside the gate," said Tommy, untangling himself from the shrubbery and heading off toward the cellars.

* * *

Avram Belinsky was something less than sanguine at the prospect of conveying two fugitives from the law.

"Yeah, I KNOW," Tommy replied to his friend's frown. "I KNOW, but they're friends of mine. Listen, didn't I save your ass from that posse?"

"When you got them after us in the first place," Avram reminded him.

"That ain't the point, Avram! The point is," the ex-bank robber looked the rabbi straight in the eye, "point is, they're FRIENDS. You gotta stick by your friends. Didn't I walk all that damn Saturday with you? Didn't I?"

A few paces away, Kevie and Lang waited nervously, casting occasional glances up the eastward road. Lang's habit was far too short exposing her ankles

and sandaled feet, and Kevie's was far too long so that she looked like a little burnt dumpling. They were a rather pathetic pair to behold.

Avram eyed them around Tommy's shoulder, sighed and nodded with resignation. "Okay, Cowboy. We give them a ride. BUT! If trouble comes of this, I don't know what..."

"Won't be no trouble!" Lillard assured him cheerfully. "Come on, ladies. Pile in!" And they did, each giving Tommy and Avram a quick hug, and, with a flurry of black robes and some giggles, snuggled comfortably in among the wine.

They had not gone too far, the rabbi at the reins of his two-horse hitch, when Tommy heard the distinct 'pop' of a wine bottle being broached.

"Have a snort, Padre," said Lang, and a bottle appeared between them.

Belinsky looked skyward.

"Aw, come on, Cuz. Live a little." Lillard accepted the proffered wine, saluted the disreputable nuns in the wagon behind, and took a long pull.

"My turn," Lang said. Tommy handed it back.

There was the sound of much liquid consumption in the wagon bed, and in a few moments, Kevie and Lang raised their off-key voices in song. That it was 'Ladies of Abilene' delighted Tommy, though Avram looked mildly scandalized to be dutifully driving a wagonload of congregational wine to the half-drunken accompaniment of one of the bawdiest songs west of the Rockies.

Still, the sun was shining, the prospect was fair.

After a while, they crossed a little stream which bubbled merrily over the roadway. Beside him, Tommy noted the rabbi was beginning to smile. He turned to reach for the wine once more and his hand froze in mid-air. Behind them, still a good distance off but closing, was the dust cloud of a horse ridden hard.

"Sonovabitch!" Tommy commented. "Ten to one that's your Pitts."

The girls looked back down the road, then turned sheepish expressions on Lillard. "I think you're right," Kevie said. "What do we do?"

Avram was looking at him questioningly as well, and Tommy felt a bit hemmed in. His first inclination was to reach for his gun, but in this case, he decided, that would only cause more problems. A ruse was needed. He looked around them.

"Avram!" he commanded, "get the wagon into the trees!" Tommy pointed at a good-sized stand of oak not far to the right of the road. "And you two--GET DOWN!"

Avram and the girls obeyed at once. The dust cloud was gaining on them.

Reining in beneath the branches, Avram asked, "What are you going to do?"

Tommy ignored him for the moment. He swung out of the wagon and, looking around, spied a likely tree. "Kevie, you and Lang get up that oak tree there quick." He hauled them out of the wagon without ceremony and gave each a leg-up into the tree's massive fork.



Lybarger '83

"I can't climb in this thing," Kevie protested.

"Climb or die, honey," Lillard said ominously.

Scrambling and cursing fearfully, the two girls managed somehow to make their way up into the concealing leaves. There they squirmed and fretted a bit, and Tommy could hear the clink of wine bottles.

Two drunk whores in a tree, he thought. This has got to be my lucky day.

"Tommy!" Avram insisted. "What are you going to do?" The sound of horses' hooves approached.

"Listen, rabbi, there's just you and me. We just stopped to..." He was interrupted by a horse and rider, bursting into the clearing.

The man reined his black gelding back on its haunches. "I'm Federal Marshal Otis Pitts," he announced loudly, "and I'm in pursuit of two female fugitives." He was an imposing figure, large, dark and hirsute. He was also in possession of twin side-arms, a scabbard carbine and a shiny badge fastened prominently to his road-stained woolen vest.

Tommy and Avram gave him two very obtuse looks.

"Huh?" said Tommy, squinting up at Pitts as though hard of hearing or perhaps slow of wit. Perhaps both.

"I said I'm a federal marshal pursuing two women, probably disguised as nuns."

"What's a nun?" asked Tommy.

"Uh, Mr. Pitts," Avram began, eyeing Tommy sideways, "we was just resting our horses here, ummm...on our way back home. You see, I am a rabbi, and..."

"We ain't seen nobody," Tommy put in, but Pitts had dismounted and was moving about the clearing as though looking for nun-tracks.

"They ain't behind me," he growled. "And unless they stole a horse, they can't be too far ahead."

With a queasy feeling, Tommy saw Pitts was directly beneath Kevie and Lang's tree. He fervently hoped the marshal believed in large birds, for there was some heavy-duty rustling going on in the shrouded branches above his head.

"And when I find them," Pitts turned a dark, fierce countenance upon the cowboy and the rabbi, "when I find them, I'll..."

What terrible fate Marshal Pitts had in mind for his quarry remained a mystery, however, for at that moment, Lang, who had apparently tilted too far back in her earnest efforts to empty the wine bottle, slipped off her perch and came crashing down through the branches. Like a ponderous, clumsy vulture, she tumbled through the leaves and twigs.

The unfortunate marshal had only a moment to look up, startled, before he was bombarded by yards of black cloth and a tangle of arms and legs.

"Oh, shit!" said Tommy.

"Oy gevalt!" said Avram.

If Pitts said anything, it was muffled by his assailant and drowned in the shrieks of the two girls.

"Ride 'em, Lang!" Kevie yelled with alcoholic enthusiasm as she clambored down the tree.

Tommy and Avram watched helplessly, wanting to laugh and yet well aware of the danger, as Pitts reeled around the clearing with Lang on his shoulders.

Lacking anything better to do, Tommy pulled his gun. "This is getting complicated, rabbi," he complained.

"You wouldn't shoot him, would you?"

"Hell, rabbi, I don't know what I'm gonna do."

But Lang resolved the dilemma momentarily by breaking her empty wine bottle over Pitts' head, and the two collapsed in a heap onto the grass.

"Nice going, gal," Kevie congratulated her friend, tripping over her skirts as she approached, bottle at the ready.

"Hold on, Kevie," Tommy cautioned. "Your little friend there," he indicated Lang who was unsteadily regaining her feet, "she put out his lights good."

Kevie laughed. "Oh, Lang's great at that."

The four of them stood together, looking down at Federal Marshal Pitts sprawled inelegantly at their feet.

"And what now?" Avram wanted to know.

Tommy removed his hat, wiped his forehead with his arm, replaced the hat. He planted his knuckles on his hips. "Shit," he said, for possibly the twentieth time in as many minutes.

All eyes were on the perplexed cowboy.

"Well, there's only one thing I can think of," he said.

* * *

Otis Pitts opened his eyes and looked around. The first thing he saw, beyond the immediate grassy sward upon which he lay, was the black-clad rabbi and his subnormal friend, both trussed securely to an oak tree.

"Avram, he's awake. Look Avram!" Tommy exclaimed with simple-minded glee.

"Mr. Pitts!" Avram raised his voice. "What a terrible thing to happen! Those women...Oy!"



Pitts struggled to his feet, picked up his hat and dusted it off. "What the hell happened?" he asked, gently kneading the large goose egg on his forehead.

"Well, they were hiding in the tree," Avram declared with a good amount of indignation, "and...and...they lept down onto you before we could stop them...and one of them hit you with..."

"A rock. It was a big rock," Tommy put in, understanding his friend's reluctance to bend the truth. Being under no such compunctions himself, however, the cowboy continued. "They knocked you out and before we knew what was happening, they got your guns and got the drop on us, huh, Avram?"

"Oy, it was very frightening," the rabbi agreed.

"Then they tied us up and stole our wagon!" Tommy shut up on that righteous note and watched it sink in.

Pitts looked around. His black gelding stood patiently to one side of the clearing, his scabbard empty of the carbine. The twin revolvers were also missing.

"They took my gun, too," Tommy lamented. "Hey, you gonna untie us, Mr. Pitts?"

"Which way'd they go?" Pitts rapped, ignoring Tommy's obvious distress.

"Uh...I think I saw them head back up the road the way we came," Avram ventured, which was the truth.

Pitts, hand-to-head and cursing under his breath, stalked to his horse and mounted. "When I find those two..." he began, his expression one of savagery egged on by a whacking headache, "...when I find those two, they'll be SORRY!"

"Hey, Mr. Pitts! Ain't you gonna untie us?" Tommy called after him, but the marshal kicked his big black into a gallop and took off among the trees.

"Jee-zus!" Tommy said after a minute. "Hope to hell the gals remembered what to do."

"They were pretty drunk," Avram shook his head pessimistically. "Here," he said, twisting out of his bonds, "can you get your hands free?"

Tommy was slipping out of the last of his crudely-tied ropes when the wagon came with a squeak and a clink into the clearing. Just barely aboard were two of the most ridiculous looking women either he or Avram had ever seen.

Disheveled hair rioting, wimples pushed back and trailing yards of cloth, they'd hiked their habits up over their knees and were companionably sharing yet another bottle of wine.

"Jee-zus!" Tommy said again. "You look awful!"

"You probably would, too, if I could see you, Lillard," grinned Kevie, and winked with such exaggeration her face seemed to slide sideways.

"You do what I said?"

"Sure, sure," Lang beamed happily.

"Took to the stream bed and doubled back behind the hill?"

"Sure, sure."

Lillard damn sure hoped so.

"He'll have to go all the way back to the abbey before he figures out they ain't in front of him," he told Avram. "And chances are he'll think they kept going, or took off the road somewheres."

"You sure this is not another 'dumb ass' trick, Tommy?" Avram looked skeptical.

"Hell, no, Rabbi. It's a real dumb ass trick. But I'm counting on one thing."

"And that is?"

"That it ain't as dumb as that marshal. Come on, let's get moving."

"You gonna drive, Tommy?" asked Kevie. They turned just in time to see Lang up-end another bottle and go ass-over into the wagon bed. "Cause I don't think my friend here," she indicated the empty space beside her, "is in any fit condition." Avram and Tommy exchanged glances.

"I'll drive," said the rabbi.

"Good. I'll nap," Kevie replied, and like a very short tree, fell backward and off the seat to land beside her friend among the wine.

"Timber," Tommy said softly.

* * *

To the sound of horses' hooves, and gentle snoring coming from the wagon bed, Tommy and the rabbi made their way north through the coastal hills toward San Francisco.

They had covered some miles. And when the sun was dipping below the cloud bank far off to the left that spoke to them of the sea, and pursuit appeared very unlikely, Avram said to Tommy, "You know something, Chowboy?"

Tommy, who had been dozing, yawned and stretched. "What's that, rabbi?" he asked.

"Those friends of yours. They remind me of that card game you were teaching me the other day."

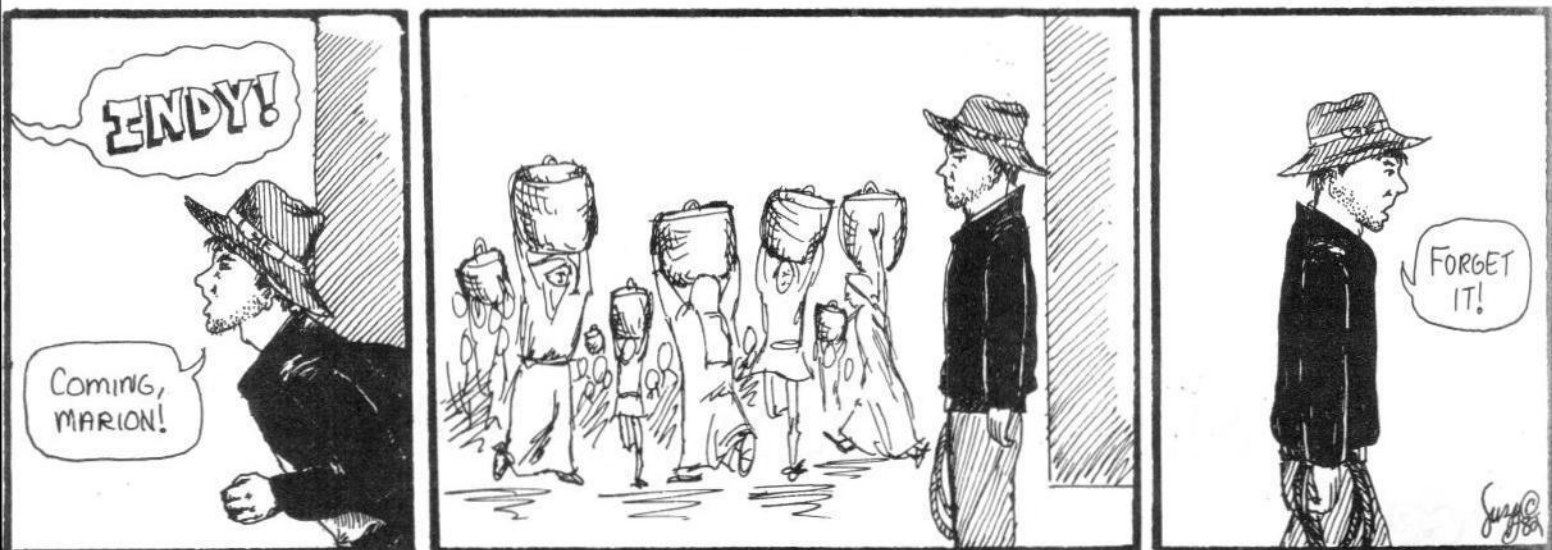
"Oh, yeah? How's that?"

"Well, they remind me of that hand, you know, the Lodi Straight."

Tommy considered that. "And how come they remind you of a Lodi Straight?" he said after a moment.

Avram had been looking ahead into the growing dusk. Now he turned to his friend, his eyes lit with a whimsical smile.

"Because with a pair like that," he cocked his head toward the back of the wagon, "you need all the help you can get."





BOUNDARIES OF A

This sure ain't the way I expected it to end.
No siree.
I thought I'd spend a couple more years
Cruising through the known galaxies
Seeing the sights
Earning some money
Meeting some ladies.
But I had to go and get myself hooked up with
This hokey Alliance outfit,
Sorta caught up in their idealistic fantasies.
And it's all because of that stinking Sith Lord
And his damn Imperial goon army
(And Lando Calrissian)
That I'm stuck here
Suspended
As good as dead.
It can't end like this.
I got things left that I gotta do.
Like living.
Living was always one of my favorite pastimes.
You can't fault a man for pursuing a hobby, can you?
I got things left that I gotta say.
Like to Chewie.
You were always a pal, through thick and thin.
(Why'd the thick always outweigh the thin?)
I never could've found a better first mate.
Take care of my ship, okay?
You're the only one I can trust with her.
And to Lando.
You're gonna pay for this, you bastard.
You're the no-good, slimy, double-crossing swindler
In this deal, pal.
If I ever get out of this mess,
You'll regret it.
And to Luke.
Knock 'em dead, kid.
I know that my teasing you about the Force got you riled up.
But that's all it was, Luke--teasing.
I may not believe in it myself
But you sure as hell can do a lot with it.
If it works for you, use it.

SLEEPING KING'S DOMAIN



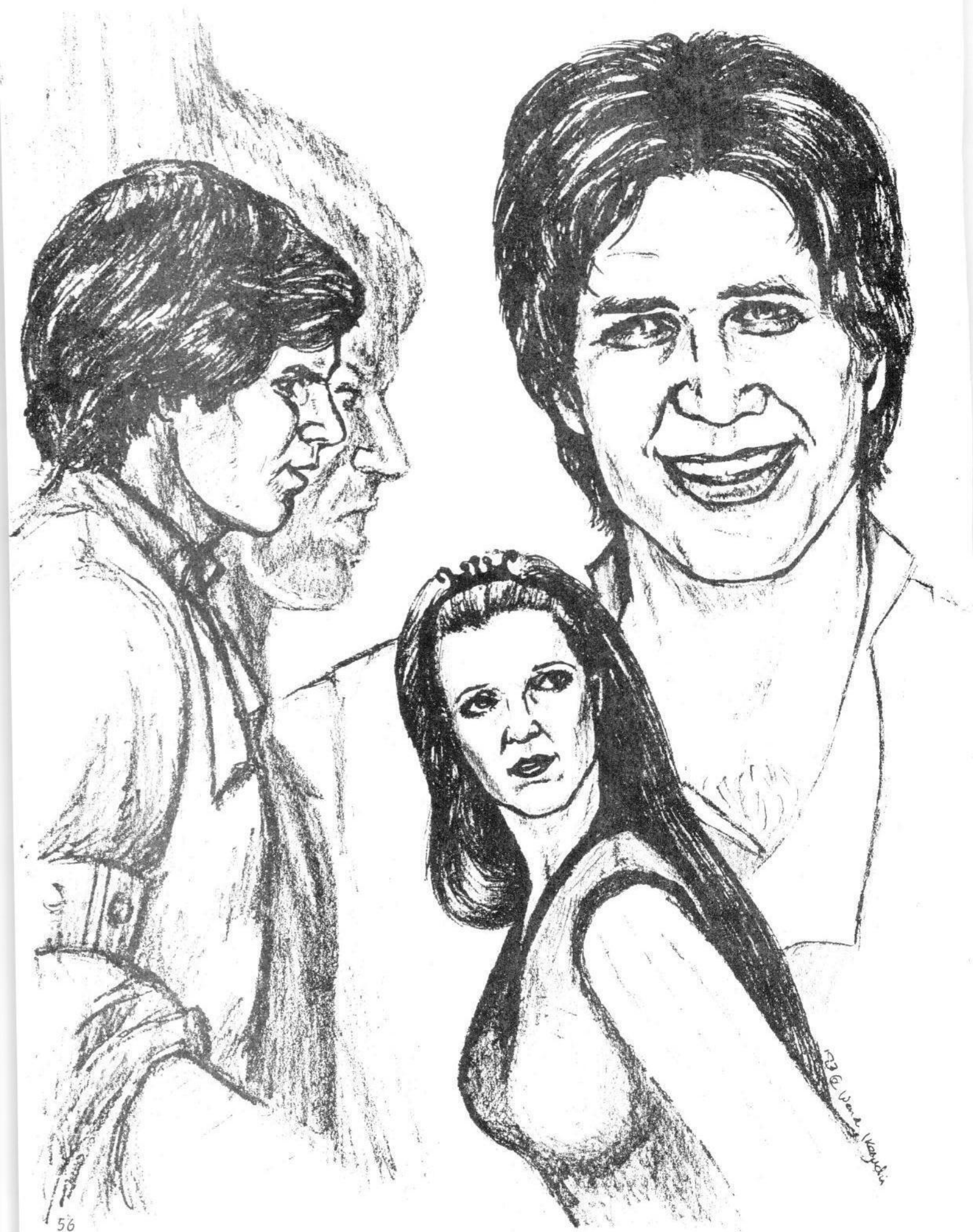


You can't drop it just because this battle-weary Corellian
Says it ain't with him.
If it was, I wouldn't be here right now.
Would I?
May the Force be with you, Luke Skywalker.
Always.
And to Leia.
I saved you for last
Simply because I don't know what to say.
What I gotta say has to come from the heart
And I don't like to let my heart do my thinking.
It ain't healthy.
And I can't say that I love you.
Maybe I do.
I haven't really loved a woman for a long time.
I ain't the right man for you to love.
You wouldn't be happy.
I wouldn't either.
A Corellian spice smuggler and a princess from Alderaan
Just ain't a proper couple.
I know what you're thinking.
"Han Solo, social misfit,
Suddenly listening to etiquette."
I ain't just thinking about myself.
I'm thinking about you, too.
It was fun while it lasted.
But it can't last forever,
No matter how hard we try.
Maybe it's better for you that I'm gone,
Even if I don't like being stuck in this limbo,
Not knowing if I'll live or die.
And don't go carrying a torch for me.
You'd be wasting your life.
Look behind you.
There's a budding Jedi Knight waiting for you.
Don't let him go.
He can give you the love
That I ain't able to give.
Take care of yourself, my Leia.
Luke needs you.
The Alliance needs you.
The galaxy needs you.

Stop this insane war
Before others follow me into hell.

Ruth Radecki





136 Wanda Karycki



SONG OF A PRINCESS

I've called him many names in these past few years;
Flyboy, laser brain, nerfherder, scoundrel.
I've insulted him at every opportunity;
"Someday you're going to be wrong, and I just hope I'm there to see it."
He loved it. . . I know he did.
Otherwise, would he have continued to plague me
--Calling me names, insulting me--
And always with a smile on his face?
He was joking, while I was serious.
But was I really that serious?
If I really dislike him, why does he keep haunting me?
His face. . . laughing eyes, warm smile.
His voice. . . "You like me because I'm a scoundrel."
His touch. . . I really was trembling that day on the *Falcon*.
Only once did I say something I meant.
Surrounded by friends and enemies, all eyes focused on us,
Our vision clouded by steam, our hearing assaulted by deafening noises,
I saw and heard only one man,
Laughter gone, replaced by sadness.
Then something stirred within me,
Something I had tried to hide, to bury,
To pretend didn't exist, to kill.
But there it was, trying to claw its way out of its grave.
I couldn't hold it in because I knew it was true.
No matter how much I denied it, I knew it was true.
It took a threat of death--his, mine, ours--to make me realize it.
It was too late, but I had to let him know.
I said three words to him that I had never said to anyone else.
"I love you."
I still mean it.
I still feel it.
I still want it.
There's just one thing missing.
Han.
Come back to me, my beloved.

Ruth Radecki



THOUGHTS

What am I doing with this woman
Who isn't a woman at all?
But that's not quite right.
She's dependent on the memory of a woman,
She acts like a woman,
She feels like a woman . . .
She feels something,
But doesn't know what.
Maybe love can make her human.
How do you teach a replicant to love?
Can you?
Well, I'd better try
Cause my time's running out,
And so is hers.

Suzy

Sansom



COLONEL CAPTAIN MR. DECK

Mysti Frank

"Oh...ouch."

"Hey, he's coming around."

Deckard's head *hurt*. What had happened? Had he gotten drunk? He could remember nothing of the night before. He *must've* gotten drunk for his head to be splitting this much. He tried to sit up and quickly decided he didn't want to.

"Ooooooh...", he groaned, lying back down. He could hear voices. He opened his eyes, and immediately shut them again. If he hadn't gotten drunk last night, he must've breathed too much spinner exhaust!

"No you don't," he heard a deep voice say. "Up an' at 'em, soldier." He felt himself being stood up, but he refused to open his eyes. *I can't've just seen what I thought I just saw*, he pleaded to his self. *Well, only one way to find out*, his self answered. *You're a lot of help*, he thought sourly.

One eye slowly, cautiously opened. Nope, they were still there. Obviously, this was not a dream, and they were not going to just go away. He opened the other eye.

The three men, one on each side of him supporting him, and the third in front, grinned.

"You don't look so good, soldier," said the same man who had spoken before. He was tall, thin, and clad in olive green and khaki. "Allow me to introduce myself and the others. I am Colonel Barnsby. You must be Deckard, R." It was a statement. Deckard nodded anyway.

He leaned forward to try and get a glimpse of what was in the manila folder that had suddenly appeared in Barnsby's hands. Barnsby stepped back, and shut the folder, which magically disappeared again. He turned to the two men who had let go of Deckard's arms, but were still standing beside him.

"This," he said, gesturing to the man on Deckard's right, "is Captain Han Solo. And the man to your left is Mr. Indiana Jones." Jones nodded in greeting, but Solo remained aloof.

"Gentlemen, I give you Mr. Richard No-Middle-Name Deckard, the Blade Runner." Deckard ignored the urge to take a bow, and took in the two men standing beside him.

One--what was his name? Solo?--was dressed in dark trousers with a red stripe down the side, a white shirt and a dark vest. Deckard could see no sign of rank, so he took Barnsby's word that Solo was a captain. Solo took the scrutiny and gave one in return, smiling cockily.

"Do I pass?" he stage-whispered. Deckard ignored him, and his own stomach that was trying to show him what belly dancing really was, and turned his eyes upon the second man.

He, too, was dressed in khaki, but unlike Barnsby, his clothes were old-looking and rumpled. On his head was an old felt hat that was as unkempt as his beard seemed to be. And around his shoulder and upper arm was coiled what appeared to be a rope of braided leather. Deckard knew it couldn't be real leather because that was illegal. Besides, the last real cow had died of pollution poisoning years ago.

"Excuse me, Mr. Jones. What's that on your arm?"

"Indy, please. This?" he smiled, fondling the rope. "This is a bullwhip made from actual cowhide. When I got here, this was with me. Part of my character, y'see. I guess this is the only way my fans can see me."

"The fact that you have it with you twenty-four standard time parts a day wouldn't have anything to do with it, would it?" said Han Solo smugly.

"Listen, you glorified space jockey, I..."

"Is it really real leather?" interjected Deckard quickly to stop what felt like the beginning of World War IV. "It's a good thing I'm a retired Blade Runner, or I'd have to run you in!"

"What for?" Jones asked, as all three men turned toward him, interested.

"What for?!" exploded Deckard. "Don't you know that real leather is illegal?"

"Not here. Maybe where you're from..." Indy left the question-like answer hanging.

That started Deckard thinking again. He looked around. All he could see was a white floor that he could see out of the corner of his eye. Everytime he looked directly at it, the floor lost distinction and became misty. It stretched out to the horizon. No walls, no ceiling.

"Where exactly is 'here'?"

"Limbo," said Solo solemnly, losing his seemingly ever-present cocky smile for the first time. "Limbo."

"I don't understand," said Deckard. He was starting to feel nervous. He rubbed his eyes, blurring his vision for a moment. Before it cleared, he could've sworn he was seeing triplets. He shook his head and the feeling left.

Barnsby stepped forward. "Let me explain. This," he said, waving his arm out at the white expanse, "is Limbo, a place where all his characters come."

"His? Who is he?"

Barnsby crossed his arms, and his voice took on the tone one gets when explaining the simplest fact to a child who is acting puzzled on purpose. "He is an actor by the name of Harrison Ford. He does movies and a little T.V. You do know what T.V. is, don't you? Oh, yes. You're from the future, aren't you? Anyway, Harrison Ford has become very popular lately. Those two," he pointed to Solo and Jones, "seem to think it's all because of them. Anyway, after he is finished with a character, it is banished here for all eternity, kept alive only by the memories of its fans. And, eventually, even those fade. And as they fade, so do we." He shook his head sadly.

"But...but I'm not a character. I'm a real human!" protested Deckard. "I'm just as real as you are!"

"It took us all a little getting used to," said Solo sympathetically.

"Oh, you're a fine one to talk, Solo!" Indy broke in angrily. "You've already been called back once, and even now you're working on a film!"

Han leaned back and crossed his arms. His cocky smile was once again on his lips. His eyes twinkled with something Deckard was sure was more than merriment. "When you're hot, you're hot," he said impishly.

Puzzlement showed in Deckard's eyes. "But if he's working, then why is he here?"

"Harri's day off."

"Oh, I see," said Deckard, not seeing at all. He was silent for a minute, thinking. "What happens to the rest of the, uh, characters?"

"That's the sad part. All the leading ladies are swept away. We're never allowed to stay together."

"You mean that Rachael's been...terminated?" he gasped.

"Oh, no," said Indy quickly. "I didn't mean to imply that at all. What I meant was that we're simply separated." His eyes grew suspiciously bright. "Simply," he spat out bitterly. "What a deceiving word that is." He sighed. "Oh, Marion..."

"What's with the 'Oh, Marion'? Have you forgotten that you walked out on her when she was but a child of fifteen solar years, deeply in love with you?" demanded Solo.

"Well, at least I told her I loved her!" Indy snapped. Han blushed deeply and turned away.

Deckard looked at Barnsby, surprised he was not joining the conversation. Barnsby shrugged his shoulders, and smiled, embarrassed. "I never had a leading lady. I was married to the Army." He dropped his eyes and strove hard to look unaffected. Jones and Solo glared at each other, the tension grew. *Time to change the subject*, thought Deckard.

"So, what do you fellas do around here for excitement?"

Solo's glare lost some of its deadliness. He turned to Deckard. "We sit around and tell stories of way-back-when, and try to guess how long we'll last. It takes a lot of fans to get you here, y'know. And even more to sustain you. You almost didn't make it, Deck. I figure you'll be next to go after Barnsby. Then it's a toss-up between me and him," said Han, jerking a thumb in Indy's direction.

"Han's not well known for his manners or his modesty. You'll have to excuse him," said Indy. Han just smiled.

A few minutes passed as they just sat and stared at each other. *If this is what it's going to be like, thought Deckard, I don't think I'll mind going next after Barnsby at all.*

Barnsby cleared his throat. "There are the fanzines."

"What are fanzines?"

"That's a word that means 'fan magazine,' or fanzine. It's a publication that fans put out in all different shapes and sizes. They get together and draw pictures, and write poems, and write stories of their favorite character. And then they send them to people all over the Earth."

"I..."

"Listen, Solo. I've told you half-a-dozen times! There is too an Earth! Just because you've never heard of it, doesn't mean it doesn't exist!"

Deckard laid down on the misty floor, half-listening to Solo and Barnsby arguing over the feasibility of Earth. *Fanzines, huh? Well, he thought, I hope they treat me kindly. I wonder what my life expectancy is?* And he drifted off to sleep with a slight smile on his face.

BAD TIMING

There's no justice in the galaxy.
Hell, I've known that all my life.
But to thaw out blind and miss the sight
Of my half-clad future wife?

I understand why Jabba's laughing!
Adds insult to injury. . . .
And if I know her, she'll change her clothes
Ten minutes before I can see!

- JACQUELINE TAERO



A MAN SUCH AS DREAMS ARE MADE OF

A Corellian is a fellow in
Trouble (and trouble galore!).
He can't seem to stay, at work or at play,
Out of a fix for a minute or more.

A blaster seems faster in the hands of a master.
A Corellian knows what he's doing.
His shots are so hot that they hit the same spot,
But others' seem to go right through him.

Many a fool has died in a duel
When a Corellian he happened to anger.
Although it doesn't take much (a bad word, or such)
The speaker has just dived into danger.

And what a surprise to see such hazel eyes
In the face of a Corellian male.
To see what's behind in the back of his mind
Is the point at which most beings fail.

It takes a strong woman with a lot of acumen
To know when to let him defend.
For with his blaster, he might forestall a disaster,
Or help it along to its end.

The Corellian man is the type who can
Be alone from the time of his birth.
But a friendship is born and can never be torn
If a person has proof of his worth.

He won't live forever, and someday he'll sever
His time-line, that's his plan.
And when his name gets mentioned, they'll drop all
pretention,
And say, "He was a hell of a Corellian!"

Mysti Frank



ode to a JOB

I thought I'd stopped my killing.
I thought I'd stopped my war.
Because killing is like drinking whiskey:
Once you've had some, you want more.

You're a Blade Runner forever more.

But Gaff came to take me to
Bryant's office in the steeple.
He told me, "You're either a cop
Or one of the little people."

You're a Blade Runner forever more.

No choice had I -
I was a cop once more.
My mission - to track down
The Nexus 6 Four.

You're a Blade Runner forever more.

Zhora was first,
And in the street it was done,
It took three bullets,
And I'd just killed one.

You're a Blade Runner forever more.

Leon was next.
We fought. (I got the worst.)
He could've killed me easily,
But Rachael shot him first.

You're a Blade Runner forever more.

I went to Sebastian's apartment,
Where Pris tried to crack my head like a nut.
I shot her twice with my blaster,
And got a sick feeling in my gut.

You're a Blade Runner forever more.

well done

Batty saw what I had done to Pris,
And followed me up to the roof.
In his love of life he stopped my fall,
And I watched him die as proof.

You're a Blade Runner forever more.

My job was over, my mission complete.
But I felt no cause to laugh.
I ran to my apartment, crying silently, "Rachael!"
I had to find and hide her from Gaff.

You're a Blade Runner forever more.

I ran to her as she lay in my bed,
My feelings leaking from me like a sieve.
On the floor we found a unicorn.
Gaff had been there...and let her live.

You're a Blade Runner forever more.

Tyrell had told me she was special.
She had no termination date.
She was warm, and soft, and had memories.
The length of our love is up to fate.

You're a Blade Runner forever more.

We jumped in my spinner and spun out in time
To a place where we'd both never been.
Where love is forever, and less than a second.
Where there's no game, and no lose, and no win.

You're a Blade Runner forever more.

Our love was long and fast and hard.
We made the most of it because
We didn't know how long we'd have together,
But then again, who does?

You're a Blade Runner forever more.
Quoth a forgotten poem, "Nevermore."

mysti frank

THE WEDDING PRESENT

Joan Shumsky

"Look, I ain't in this for your revolution and I'm not in it for you, Princess. I expect to be well paid."

Colonel Han Solo, the newest member of the Alliance, stood on the small balcony and gazed up at the sky. The lush tropical night brought the stars within reach and he couldn't get enough of the sight denied to him for so long. That, and the sight of Leia's lovely face. When Han regained consciousness and the fog had cleared, the first thing he saw was her face, tear-stained, etched with pain and love.

And all for him!

With an involuntary shudder, Han recalled his ordeal. Two years, two years of my life in a black void! He remembered how, during that terrible time, something stirred his consciousness with memories he couldn't grasp. Other times, everything was sharp and clear, especially his images of Leia. Then, for long periods of time, nothing, just black, empty silence.

Han's rescue almost a year ago and his long recovery had afforded him time to think, to think about his friends, about the Alliance and about Leia. When he was well enough to understand, he learned the rebels had made steady progress against the Empire, and how more and more people had joined the Alliance.

Including me!

Luke, completing his Jedi training, was one of the reasons behind the rebels' mounting victories.

Well, kid, looks like that Force of yours has been working overtime. Oh, hell! Who am I kidding? It saved MY butt, didn't it? Hey, watch it, Solo. You can't keep calling a Jedi Knight 'kid.'

A lot of things had changed in three years, including the captain of the *Millenium Falcon*. Physically, except for a pound or two and the beard he now wore, he was the same man. Leia, teasing him, said he looked more like a pirate than ever.

No, it was something else. His attitudes were different. For the first time in his life, aside from Chewie, there were people who cared about his



Corellian hide, cared enough to search until they rescued him from that living hell. It was a damn good feeling not to keep looking over his shoulder all the time, ready to reach for his blaster.

So, when he was able, Han made a commitment to the Alliance. Now, he was a Colonel in the rebel forces and, the funny thing about it all, he *liked* belonging. Before it hadn't mattered whether his life had purpose. Flying across the galaxy with Chewie at his side, running cargo and taking the occasional risk had been enough until he tangled with a little slip of a girl who showed him what raw courage, commitment and love meant...especially the love part.

He had changed all right, but tomorrow, tomorrow would see the biggest change of all. Han Solo, one-time smuggler, loner and firm believer in the 'love-em-and-leave-em' school of romance, was getting married.

Married! A few years ago the idea would have been enough to send him and the Falcon streaking across the galaxy in terror, but now the thought of a life without Leia was intolerable and if it meant the ties of marriage, that was the way it would have to be. Han grinned to himself. *One thing's for certain--it sure as hell won't be boring!*

Han thought back over his friends' reactions when they found out his plans. He couldn't understand why no one was surprised.

I guess Chewie knew all along how I felt...how WE felt. He kept hinting, but I was too dense to catch on. Well, at least tomorrow he'll be there to hold my hand, along with Luke.

Luke. His friend and brother...and more.

Han walked back into the room which was part of the suite assigned to him. It was quite luxurious, as was everything else in the complex. Once a resort for high-ranking Empire officials, it now served as Alliance headquarters on the planet. Han compared his surroundings to those of the rebel base on Hoth. The contrast was ludicrous.

Strolling over to a low table, the Corellian picked up the carved box he had purchased that morning, opened it and examined the contents. Hearing someone at the door, he quickly closed the lid and placed the box on a table near the balcony.

The door opened and the Princess Leia Organa entered, smiling shyly at Han as she walked into his waiting arms. After a brief kiss, Leia looked up at him and, as they had done so often since his return, searched each other's eyes and with gentle fingers, caressed each other's faces.

Sighing, Leia leaned against Han's shoulder. "Sorry, love, but there were some last minute details." When Han didn't answer, Leia looked up at his face and frowned when she saw his expression. "Han, is something wrong?"

Quickly, the Corellian shook himself out of his reverie. He knew Leia was concerned about his health, worried that he had not fully recovered. Grinning to himself, Han mused, *Hell, she ought to know by now that everything's back in working order...everything!*

Looking down at the tiny princess, Han answered smiling, "No, sweetheart, just thinking about us."

Grinning mischievously, Leia asked, "Want to back out, flyboy? There's still time."

In reply, Han kissed the princess very slowly and quite thoroughly. When he released her, he said, "Hey, got something for you." He then walked her over to the table where the box lay.

"What's this?"

Noncommittally, Han replied, "It's your wedding present."

"Wedding present! Oh, Han, I have nothing for you. I didn't think--"

Han interrupted her. "Leia, you are my wedding present."

Blushing beautifully, the princess reached for the box. Before opening it, she ran her fingers over the fine carvings. Carefully, Leia lifted the lid. "What--?"

Nestled inside the lining lay an official-looking document.

"My dowry," grinned Han.

"But, I don't understand."

"Remember the reward you gave me for rescuing you from the Death Star?"

"Yes, of course. But didn't those credits go to pay Jabba?"

"Well, not exactly. Not *those* anyway. It seems that in the excitement of the celebration after the destruction of the Death Star, Chewie hid them in the concealed compartments on the *Falcon* and somehow we forgot about them because we were too busy keeping one step ahead of the Imps. Then, a few days ago, Chewie was digging for something down in the hold and he found the whole pile. I went down in the hold and seeing all those boxes and how we had come by them, brought back a flood of memories. I discussed it with Chewie and he agreed. I had decided what to give you for a wedding present."

"But," said Leia, putting down the box, "I still don't understand."

"Leia, you know what kind of guy I was when we first met. There wasn't anything I wouldn't do for a pile of credits. Well...almost anything. At the time, I figured I'd found a pretty good source of income, selling my services to you and the Alliance, so that's why I hung around. That, and to keep Luke out of trouble."

"That's what I told myself. Then, too late, I realized the real reason I stayed was because of you. I thought, 'Great, Solo, the one time you fall for a woman, she's out of your reach'."

"After that I took out my frustrations on you, blaming you for my feelings because I felt there wasn't a chance in the galaxy you'd ever return them."

Touching Han's arm, Leia smiled up at him. "We were both pretty awful...and for the same stupid reason! Too proud to let each other know how we felt." Leia walked away. "I was afraid...afraid of what was happening to me. My feelings for you frightened me, so I decided to hide behind my title, matching your sarcasm with my own brand of nastiness."

Attuned to Leia's moods, Han realized she was getting wrapped up in too many unhappy memories and so he decided to tease her.

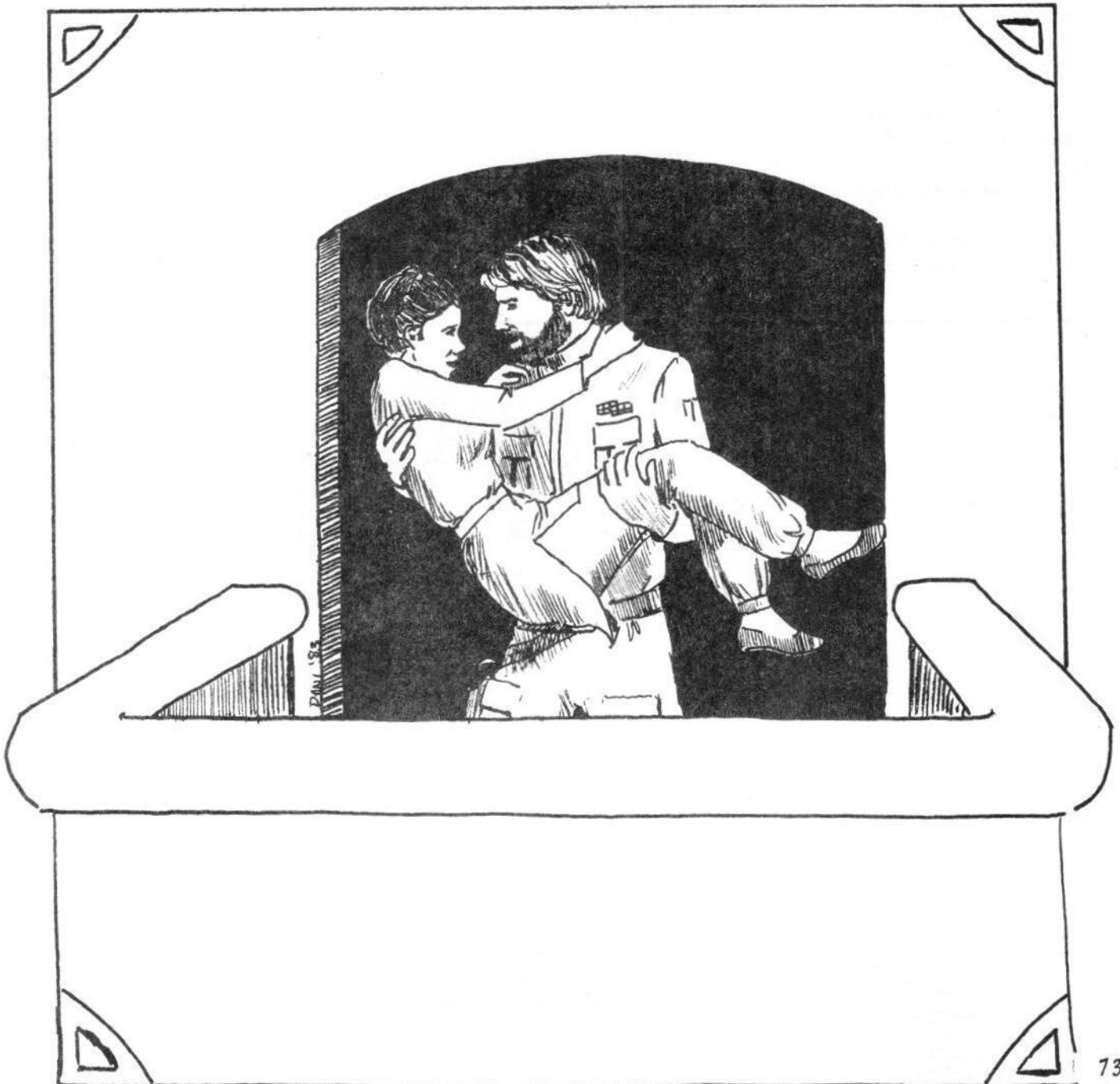
"Hey, you don't have to remind me, Your Worship. You practically bullied me into kissing you in that asteroid cave--"

"What??" Leia's eyes widened and Han prepared to duck but he couldn't resist going on.

"And after I told you we didn't have time for any of *that* stuff--" She hit him then, *hard*. Laughing, Han grabbed her, imprisoning her arms. "As I was saying, *Your Worship*, when I was so rudely interrupted--"

Her eyes flashed storm signals and sensing the inevitable explosion, Han once again kissed her, thinking, *Fighting with Leia was fun now. Making up was so...interesting!*

For a little while, they just stood, clinging to one another, both lost in their own thoughts. Presently, Han took Leia's face in his hands and looked down at her. "You know, sweetheart, it was almost worth being made into that hunk of ice because you told me you loved me. Do you know how long I'd wanted to hear you say that? Then, when I came to after all that time and saw you staring down at me, your eyes saying it all, I..." Here Han faltered, his emotions getting the better of him.



"Han, I--"

"Shhh, let me finish," he said, his voice hoarse with emotion. When Chewie found the reward, I knew I could never keep it." Seeing her puzzled expression, Han continued. "Don't you understand Leia? It was *you* I rescued from the Death Star, not some rich stranger I didn't give two hoots in hell for. It's...it's always been you!"

Leia bowed her head and walked out onto the balcony but not before Han noticed the tears forming in her eyes. Realizing he was getting too serious, he followed her outside. Standing against the doorframe, his arms crossed against his chest, he remarked in a lighter tone, "Besides where would I find another woman who can handle a blaster the way you do?"

Laughing and crying at the same time, Leia launched herself into Han's arms. Once she had composed her thoughts, the princess looked up at the tall Corellian and asked, "Colonel Solo, is it true that some poor, misguided woman once called you a 'scoundrel'?"

Han nuzzled her ear. "Yeah, the same woman who once told me she'd rather kiss a Wookiee!"

Leia giggled. "I hope you've shown her the error of her ways?"

Picking Leia up, Han grinned wickedly. "You said it yourself, sweetheart. I have a *terrific* way with people!"



PLANE TALK

Paula Truelove

Indiana stared out the window of the plane, noticing the clouds below turning a soft hue of orange with the setting sun. Looking over at the young woman sleeping soundly in the seat next to him, he noticed that she still looked nothing more than a child. However, she was hardly the child he'd left ten years ago. She had become a woman--a very beautiful woman. Marion Ravenwood. The girl with the wonderful eyes.

Seeing her for that first time in the Raven Bar had brought back memories and feelings thought long since buried--not to mention a sore jaw. He grinned at the thought of the right cross she'd dealt him.

Marion stirred slightly, mumbling something inaudible, a smile touching her lips. Indy leaned his head back against the headrest and closed his eyes.

Abner Ravenwood was dead. Crazy old fool. He was so obsessed with finding the Ark, he'd left the daughter he loved to survive in that filthy dump of a bar. No wonder she was so bitter. And now here he was, dragging Marion after the same Ark. Opening his eyes, he rolled his head to one side to look again at Marion, only to find her staring at him.

"What the hell are you lookin' at?" Marion whispered loudly as she began searching through her purse.

"Just thinking. What are you looking for?" he asked, quickly changing the subject.

"My cigarettes. They're gone." She gave up looking and leaning her head back, sighed heavily, and then looked up at the man beside her. "You know," she began, "one of my customers, a little old lady who's known in the village as a fortune teller, came into the bar a few nights ago just to tell me she'd had a vision. Said something was about to happen in my life to change it." Marion chuckled to herself. "I thought she was drunk. Then you showed up and now here I sit, broke and unemployed." Pouting, she folded her arms across her chest.

"I'm really sorry, Marion."

"You say that a lot, Jones."

Indy smiled. "I'll be sure you get back to the States, Marion. I don't know where this search for the Ark is going to take me, but I want you safe. Once we arrive at Sallah's, I'll make arrangements for your passage home."

"Home?" Marion questioned, raising an eyebrow. "Just where is that, Indy?"

Realizing only then that she had not had a real home in many, many years, Indiana hesitated a moment before answering. "I'll wire Marcus Brody back in Connecticut. Tell him to be expecting you. He can help you settle down wherever you want." Giving her a grin, he continued, "Trust me."

"Trust you! I did that before and look what happened." She began to stare out the window for a moment and then asked, "Your friend, Sallah, does he know where the Ark is?"

"No, nobody does. But he'll know what I need to find it."

"You sound like Abner. You've become as obsessed as he was. That Ark took him away from me, killed him. I don't want to see that happen to you." Realizing what she'd said, she stopped and looked down at her hands.

Indiana smiled but made no comment. Old feelings were stirring; memories of the past surfacing. Was it possible Marion did not hate him as much as she professed? Was it possible to heal old wounds? Start over? Indy realized that it would take time but he also knew that it would certainly be an interesting wait. With that thought in mind, he closed his eyes and leaned back.

After a few minutes of quiet contemplation, Marion began speaking again. "I worked my butt off making that bar more than the dump it was. Then in you came and now it's ashes, along with my money. I should have let Mohan take



his axe handle to you." She looked up to find Indy with his eyes closed and giving no indication that he had heard a word she had spoken. "Jones?" she whispered loudly. "Indy?" Still no response. "Damn you, Jones," she said through clenched teeth. Then a smile appeared as she noticed the boyish features brought on by sleep. "You make it so hard to hate you, Indiana Jones," she whispered. Lying her head back, she too decided to try to get some more sleep.

Indiana slowly opened his eyes to see Marion yawn and snuggle down in the blanket. Smiling at the thought of her last words, Indy closed his eyes once again.

SOLILOQUY

*Who needs this guy?
I was doing fine on my own,
and then I saw him standing
hip-deep in a stream, trying
to scare a fish to death,
(or whatever he thought he
was doing), and everything changed.
He says he's from Poland
(coulda sworn that was
near Pittsburgh), and he
can't tell a horse's head
from its too-cass, but
there's still something in him that
makes him stronger than me.
Oy Gevalt! He makes me crazy!
Him and his "I won't ride
on Saturday," (but he
stops riding Friday evening).
He really is mishegoona.
And those weird ethics of
his--I steal the money and
he sends it back....
Still, there's something about him.
Maybe it's because he says I'm his
best friend--
Aah--who needs him?
I do.*

- CATHIE WHITEHEAD



KENNY

I learned to hate the night in 'Nam,
and that's where I learned that the stars can lie.
We'd be lying in our foxhole in the dark;
Jungle Jack and Munroe would be talking
about the worm farm,
and while they talked, I'd be staring at the stars
and dreaming. If I turned my head a
certain way, the stars looked the way they
did at home, and I could almost believe I was
home. Then I'd see my Camaro, painted bright with
flames and my Ace of Diamonds. Aces can
stand alone--they don't need anybody.
Diamonds have sharp points like the stars, to keep
people away.
I'd see myself flying around the track; hear
the screams of the crowd,
but then the screams would turn real, and
the night would bloom with flowers of
bright flame.
Guys I had shared jokes and smokes with
would change--some faces contorted into
ugly masks of pain, while
others, worse, would stare with blank
eyes at visions of other places, and you'd
know those guys just weren't there any more.
I'd stare at the night sky, then catch
glimpses of strange stars--reminders that
home was half a world away, and I'd wonder
which of those stars would drop death
into our laps. Yeah, nights are the worst.
I still see death in the stars--try to shoot
them out before they get me.
I ain't no hero. Pappy told
me about the heroes of his day,
collecting flowers and kisses from
pretty girls who spoke strange languages.
I came home with the phony trappings of a hero--
bits of colored ribbon and metal. How much metal is
worth a life?
That's why I can't race any more--can't challenge
death by speeding away from it. The faster you
run, the closer it comes. Why tempt it?
I saw the change too often over there--one minute
laughing, living, breathing, the next, a bullet-riddled
lump of nothing that would never laugh again.
Easier to mask the pain in a haze of alcohol.
Easier not to start anything. The more you do, the
closer you bring yourself to dying.
No, I ain't no hero--heroes ain't afraid to die.
I am.

Cathie Whitehead



GETTIN' BACK TO ENGLAND



Martie Benedict

Had a dangerous assignment laid on me one day.
Seems there was this bridge I had to blow,
To keep a German army on their own side of the war,
And give 'em one less place that they could go.

And I had quite a crew with me of men all highly trained.
We were what they referred to as Force 10.
Nothing that we couldn't do, at least that's what we thought.
But now I guess we better think again.

But we've gone about as far as we can get,
But I'm still standing on my feet and I ain't quitting yet.
Don't see how we'll make it, well, I don't have a clue.
But gettin' back to England is all I want to do.

Before we even left the ground I got a big surprise.
They stuck me with two more men for my crew.
And they looked pretty useless and I couldn't understand
What in hell they were supposed to do.

It wasn't long before I figured out they were a jinx.
The whole damn plan began to fall apart.
Lost my plane, most all my men and the Germans on our case.
I think that I was doomed right from the start.

But we've gone about as far as we can get,
But I'm still standing on my feet and I ain't quitting yet.
Don't see how we'll make it, well, I don't have a clue.
But gettin' back to England is all I want to do.

Nothing we could do but play the cards we had been dealt.
And I'd been dealt a dude named Mallory.
Tacked onto my mission with some business of his own
I didn't know what use he'd ever be.

Our much-reduced contingent went to find the Partisans,
But the Cetniks picked us up and we'd been had.
I never felt so helpless, didn't know who I could trust,
But things had only started to get bad!

But we've gone about as far as we can get,
But I'm still standing on my feet and I ain't quitting yet.
Don't see how we'll make it, well, I don't have a clue.
But gettin' back to England is all I want to do.

Now my job was to blow a bridge, but Mallory's was not.
He had to off a dude name Lescovar.
Terminate a German agent, and it seemed a shame
To quit when we'd already got this far.

But Lescovar was sharp as hell. He'd be hard to bring down,
And Milly did not have the stuff on hand
That it would take to blow the bridge, and I was really pissed!
This wasn't turning out like I had planned.

But we've gone about as far as we can get,
But I'm still standing on my feet and I ain't quitting yet.
Don't see how we'll make it, well, I don't have a clue.
But gettin' back to England is all I want to do.

But Milly said that it might work if we could blow the dam
But it just might involve a little theft.
So we ripped off explosives from the German's marshalling yards.
It was the only hope that we had left.

But Lescovar, that bastard blew our cover once again,
But we got the drop on him in a box car.
I figured long as Mallory was taking out my bridge,
I'd scratch his back and blow off Lescovar.

But we've gone about as far as we can get,
But I'm still standing on my feet and I ain't quitting yet.
Don't see how we'll make it, well, I don't have a clue.
But gettin' back to England is all I want to do.

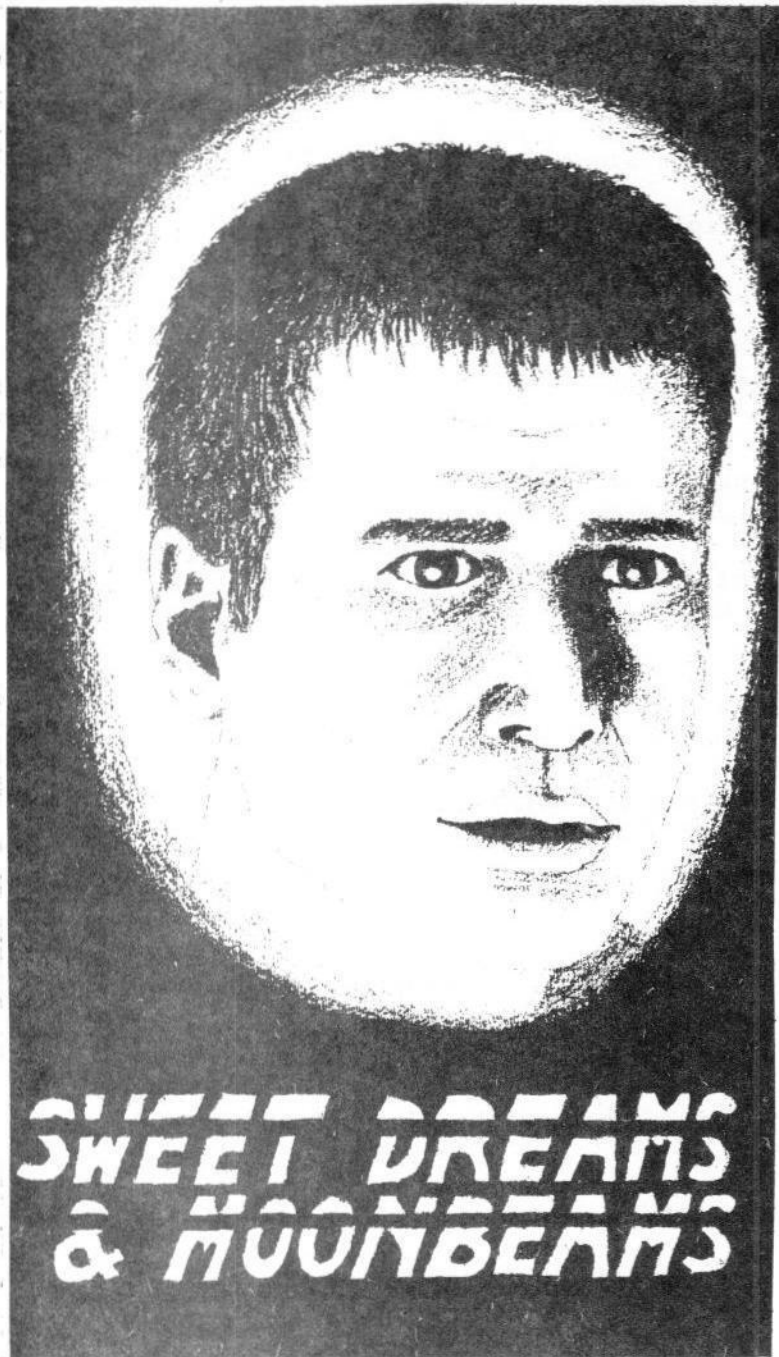
We planted our explosives when we finally realized
We'd left ourselves no time to get away.
It was a stupid place to die, stuck down inside a dam,
But "Goodbye, friend," was all we had to say.

But much to our surprise we found that we were still alive.
We ran like hell, the dam began to crack.
And all that we could hear as we went tear-ass through the woods
Was mass destruction right behind our back.

And that damn bridge and all the Germans got washed clean away
By the river's roarin', rushin' foam.
But now I'm standin' here with a thumb in my ear
And wonderin' how we'll ever get back home!

But we've gone about as far as we can get,
But I'm still standing on my feet and I ain't quittin yet.
Don't see how we'll make it, well, I don't have a clue.
But gettin' back to England is all I want to do.

Barbara Frances-Simon



The cold darkness was all around him now. He lay very still on the damp ground; the thermal blanket beneath him could not keep out the musty smell of its wetness. Surrounding him was silence. It was dead silence, which frightened him. The familiarity of the city surroundings, with its comforting bright lights and continuous noise, was gone forever.

Rick Deckard closed his eyes against the blackness. But it was still there. For him there was no escape from the dark. He shut his eyes tighter. The dark lingered.

If only the house were finished. If only he could be inside again, safe. But his work on a permanent shelter progressed slowly. Rick was a cop, not a carpenter. He'd been trained to destroy, not build.

For a while, the temporary shelter he'd put up had held up against the elements. But after enduring week after week of winter winds, it had finally collapsed. With the spinner now dismantled for parts, the only refuge left was the hard ground.

With a deep sigh, Rick looked up at the night sky

above him. For the first time, with perfect clarity, he saw the sparkling of the stars. They looked very close; he reached up in wonder to see if he could touch them. But they eluded his grasp. He frowned in puzzlement.

His movements disturbed the sleeping form of the young woman who snuggled up against him. She stirred, stretching the arm that lay across Rick's chest. Then she resettled her tousled head on his shoulder and lay still.

Alone in his thoughts, Rick had forgotten she was there with him. Her presence was comforting. He embraced her gently, kissing her forehead. Rachel sighed softly.

The reaffirmation of a recent worry grabbed in his chest--her forehead was warm. Rachel was sick. She was trying to hide it from him, but he knew.

Rachel, he thought. Rachel, my beautiful love. Please, don't be sick. Don't be...no, you won't expire. You're different from all the others. You will live. You must live. I'm afraid of being alone, alone in the dark...

He closed his eyes and held her tightly, trying to ignore the darkness. Rick was suddenly very tired.

Soon he was asleep.

And then the dreams came. Rick was back in the city, bathed in lights and sound. He was home.

He was flying in the spinner. He was walking the streets of Los Angeles. He visited the familiar places. He had a job to do.

So he searched. He poked and pried and asked a lot of questions. And he found clues. With the aid of the Esper, he discovered others. He was getting closer.

And he searched some more, checking this and that. He pressed onward. *I'll find you. And I'll kill you. That's my job.* He was very close now.

Rick was taut with anticipation. His teeth involuntarily clenched together. His hand waited eagerly near the butt of his gun. Something was about to happen.

It suddenly appeared in front of him. He knew what he had to do. It was a replicant. It was a girl.

Rick stopped. She was smiling at him. She was beautiful. He froze.

The replicant stared at him, wide-eyed with surprise. She blinked.

Rick blinked back. *It's just a girl, he thought. I don't understand. Is this the one? Yes, it is. She's--*

The girl continued her gaze, frowning now in confusion. Then, unexpectedly, she walked toward him.

Nexus 6! He backed away, frightened. This lovely woman could kill him, easily. He was vulnerable.

She did not appear threatening, but she continued to close in on him.

Rick felt the gun against the palm of his hand. With careless desperation, he tried to draw it out. He fumbled.

The girl was reaching for him now. *Hurry!* His hand was clumsily grasping at the gun. As if he were drugged, his movements were slow and difficult. *Pull the gun out!* His body was so slow obeying.

Her hands were close to his face now. But the gun was free. *Shoot!* Fingers were stretched out to him...

In surrealistic slow motion, he pulled the trigger. The hands withdrew from his face. The crashing sound of the shot reverberated from the walls of the city around him.

But the girl was still there. She was still beautiful. And she seemed unharmed.

The next shot from Rick's gun came easily. This time she staggered a bit. Again and again he fired.

Suddenly, the girl lay at his feet. He hadn't seen her fall; she was simply lying there.

For the first time, he noticed the darkness of her hair; it was a cold blackness. It was all around her face and head, that blackness.

The girl stared up at him for an endless moment. He tried to look away; an invisible force held him in her penetrating stare. He couldn't look away.

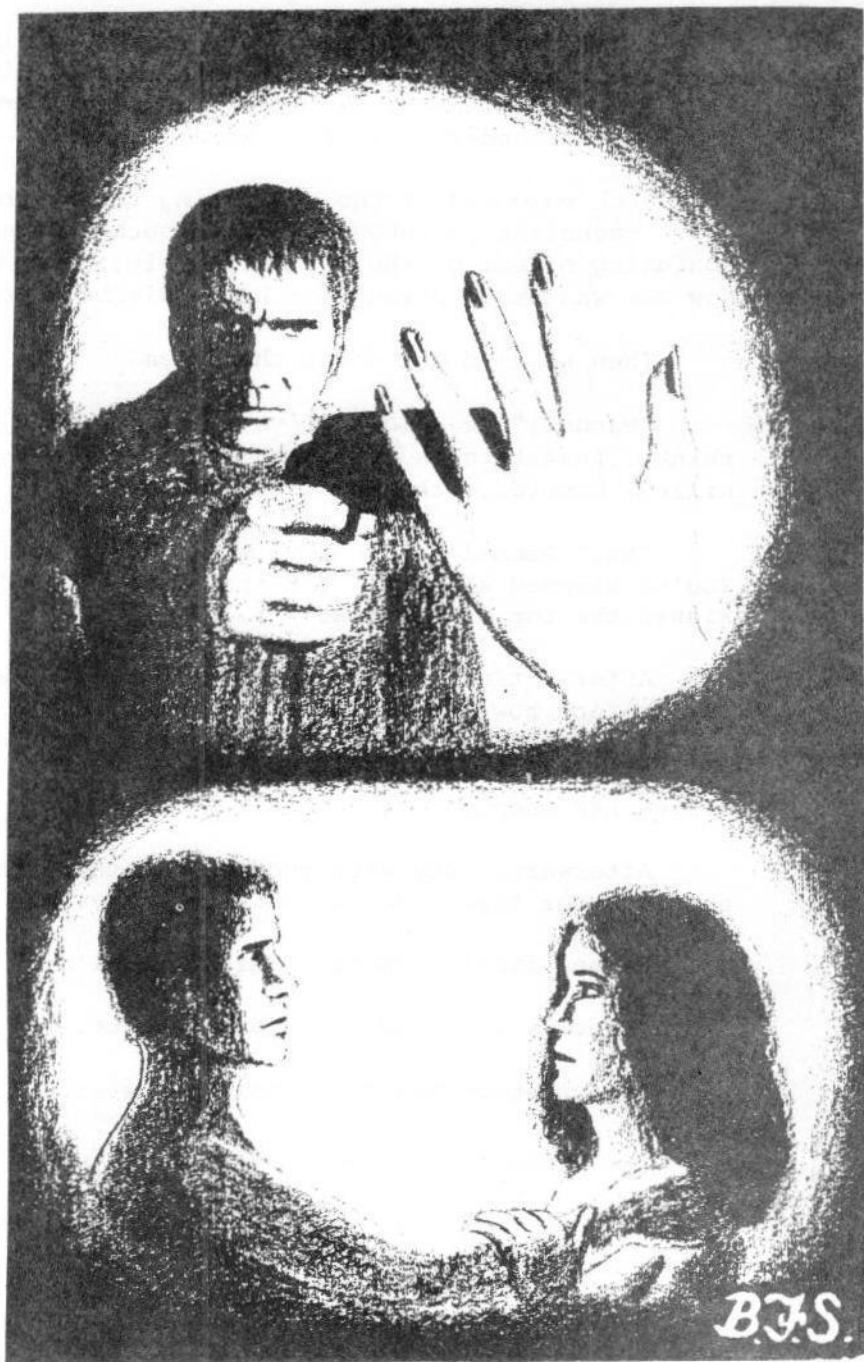
She smiled at him. It was a queer sort of smile. Rick was confused. *Why are you smiling?*

The girl didn't answer. She continued to smile up at him. Then she vanished as abruptly as she'd appeared, leaving black darkness in her wake...

Rick bolted upright in sudden wakefulness. He trembled, breathing hard.

Rachel was jarred from her sleep and looked around in confusion. "Rick..."

Then she saw him. At once she noticed his shaking. "What's wrong?" she asked. He didn't answer. She reached for him and he flinched. Uncertain, she withdrew her hand. She frowned, wondering what intangible thing had had the power to frighten him like that.



With trembling lips, he murmured, "Rachel...I had a dream..." He leaned toward her and she reached out and embraced him, pulling his head to her breast. With a new gentleness, she held him there, caressing his face and hair and rocking him tenderly as if he were a child.

Rick wondered at the comforting feeling he derived from being held that way. Rachel had somehow developed such a warm, loving instinct. Through the confusing ordeal of their relationship, he had always been the strong one. Now she was being strong for him. His body relaxed.

Then he told her about the dream.

"Rachel," he said. "I've spent my whole life killing, destroying. I think...that this is my punishment, somehow--being reminded of the ones I've killed, haunted...that awful blackness--"

"No," Rachel said. "You will redeem yourself, Rick. You already have. You've stopped killing. You spared me. And loved me. And I love you." She kissed the top of his head.

After a time, he looked up at her. She was so beautiful; there was color in her face now. She didn't look sick; could he have been wrong?

"Rachel." He touched her face. "I love you." He pulled her down and kissed her deeply.

Afterward, they were cuddled together, the light of the rising moon shining over them. For a long time they held each other that way.

Rachel finally spoke. "Rick...I--I'm--"

"What?" Panic edged into his voice.

She was more beautiful now than ever. "I'm pregnant," she whispered.

Rick went slack, gaping at her. "You're p--" He couldn't say anymore.

"I'm going to have a baby. I can feel it now inside of me." She smiled, wrapping her arms around herself.

He continued to stare at her. "But how can you...how did..." His mind spun, his thoughts a whirlpool in his head.

Her smile widened with delight. "I never heard of it happening before, either...a replicant, having a child. I'm the first, maybe, because I'm...different..."

Rick looked at her, trying to separate the conglomerate of powerful emotions that churned in him: surprise, confusion, incredulity...and wonder. Was it possible? Could it be that Rachel was carrying a child--his child? Was the "illness" which had gripped her and had caused him such terrible anxiety only normal, natural morning sickness?

Perhaps, then, he hadn't been imagining that her hips had widened somewhat, and her breasts had begun to fill out. Her body was preparing itself for motherhood.

Now he was conscious of only one feeling, one strong feeling, more powerful, more overwhelming than the rest; it was love, the love he felt for her.

She was "different," she said. But she was more than that. "You're human," Rick corrected her, his voice filled with infinite wonder. "As human as I am, maybe more." With that, he hugged her tightly. "Oh, Rachel..." She laughed. "You're alive, really alive."

"If you're happy, please tell me."

He kissed her. "Very happy," he said. He drew back to look at her. Then, gingerly, almost timidly, he touched her stomach. Rachel held his hand there. They smiled at each other.

In that moment, the world around them ceased to exist, and in the space of a heartbeat, even time was suspended.

"The past is gone forever," Rachel whispered. "We'll forget about death and about destroying; all of that's ended. Instead, we'll have life--the life you've created...in me."

Rick took her hands in his. "Life..." he echoed softly.

The darkness had fled. The dreams would return no more.

WHY?

Why did you have to come walking back through my door?

You destroyed my life once before.

I can't take any more pain.

I was doing just fine on my own.

Marion Ravenwood, proud owner of The Raven saloon.

And all you wanted was that damned headpiece.

Not me.

Just the headpiece.

When The Raven collapsed in flames

I followed you.

Why?

Don't flatter yourself, Jones.

I've known other men in the last ten years.

I needed the money.

Not you.

Just the money.

No.

I know why.

It's because I love you, Indiana Jones.

And don't you dare forget it.

- RUTH RADECKI



ice

I hate this place.
There's something here
That reaches freezing fingers
Toward my heart.
Everyone complains about the cold, I guess,
But this is something far more evil,
Something like a premonition,
Like a taste of death.
Anyway, I couldn't leave you
Friendless in this icy nothing.
You never stood a chance against
This crushing weight of cold...
There it is again, the dread,
The nameless, numbing terror in the cold.
I'll shake it off.
Can't go through life
With curling chills of fear for company.
Definitely bad for the digestion.
But I can tell you one thing --
It's gonna be one damn long night.

martie benedict





DECISION

He stopped his horse, considered, cursed, and then
Reluctantly he started once again;
Pulled up the horse, who whickered with surprise,
Brushed unexpected wetness from his eyes.
"I shouldn't ought to leave like this," he said.
The horse stomped once and tossed his patient head.
"I should go. I didn't say good-bye,"
Said Tommy, but the horse made no reply.
He swung his body slowly to the ground;
Shading his eyes he paused, looking around,
Then spoke. "I've gone a hundred miles. They'll know
By now, I'm gone for good. I had to go..."
He sighed and walked, his horse close at his heels.
"A friend's a friend. Avram knows how I feel!
But I ain't stupid and I heard the talk,
I heard those bastards and their old hens squawk
'Well, just imagine! Our own rabbi's friend
A thief, a no-good! God should know what end
A man like that will come to someday. Why,
It's just a sin to see, our own rabbi!'
He mounted up and sat in silence while
The sun went down. He smiled a crooked smile,
Thought back to when he'd begged the sun to set;
Oh, no, he wasn't likely to forget...
He turned the horse into the setting sun,
And kicked the puzzled sorrel to a run.
"A friend's a friend, and shouldn't ought to roam.
To hell with folks! This friend is comin' home."

M. E. Wickes



LOST EMBRACE

Scheherazade

A small panel on his barrel-shaped body slid back to reveal a nasty pointed instrument which extended to poke the taller golden droid in the knee joint.

"Ouch!" cried Threepio, turning around and slapping the smaller droid by reflex. "Artoo, behave yourself! I was translating for the Ambassador." The etiquett droid bowed to the delegate from Pleadth and continued in quite a different language. "I'm so sorry, sir. Now, where were we? Ah, yes, Captain Solo of the Alliance suddenly reversed his stand, thus giving up all right to the Rillum deposits on the planet Moana to the VLON mining Cartel. Princess Leia then shortly adjourned the Council meeting and--"

But the Pleadthian wasn't listening. Instead he was staring at the little droid wheeling about in circles, whistling and chirping indignantly at his feet. The amicable Ambassador held up a paw, nodded his thanks to Threepio and moved off to join his planetmen.

Threepio put his hands on his hips with a small metallic chink and glared down at his counterpart. "All right, you fugitive from a Fedsel factory, what is it? ...No, I don't monitor Dehric gas pressure lines in this sector; that's your job...What do you mean you're too short to reach the Central cut-off valve? Oh, all right! Stupid little digit."

Threepio turned on his heel, took two steps and collided with Han Solo as the human elbowed his way through the crowded auditorium. The droid was contrite. "Oh, I'm sorry, sir! It's just that snivelling little Ar--"

"Where's Leia?" said Han, letting his gaze sweep the room where diplomats, merchants and other galactic interests milled and mulled over the events of the recently adjourned meeting.

Threepio gently removed Han's hand from his metal orifice. "Princess Leia is searching for Lt. Antilles. When he didn't join you to speak on behalf of Moana, she seems to have become quite worried."

Han nodded without looking at the droid and started for the exit. A long feathered tentacle stopped him, however, and the Corellian turned to face the delegate from Ux. "Vell, vell, Solo-sen, since ven are you on the VLON payroll?" The alien appraised the shorter being with a condescending look. "I see the Rebels are not above taking a Cartel kickback. The power of being galactic ruler not enough for you?" The Uxian smirked and tossed his cigarron in a nearby ash tray. "Ve have an old saying, 'Corellian constant, thieves never change color.'"

Han surpressed the urge to unsnap the restraining strap on his blaster. He disliked Uxian politicians almost as much as he disliked Uxian gunrunners. Solo wondered how much this specimen had paid for his office.

"Moana was no garden spot," said Han, favoring the alien with a cold glare. "The New Republic can use the tax revenue from the mining." Gods, he hated politicking. A year ago he would've fried the mother, now he just nodded politely and scraped a shallow bow. "If you'll excuse me."

Solo again made his way to the exit, but he did not make it out without hearing the Uxian call after him, "You Rebels were fools not to crush the Empire when you had the chance. This plan of uniting Alliance and Imperial governments is pure folly!"

Han paused in the doorway, his back to the heads that turned in his direction in a room suddenly grown quiet. He listened to the ominous silence for a moment more, then he stepped out into the hallway. The doors slid shut behind him.

A few minutes later, a diminutive furry figure followed on padded feet.

* * *

Her long gown of lithian blue hampered her pace, so Leia Organa gathered up the fabric around her hips and hitched the hem above her ankles. Perhaps adjourning the meeting early had been a mistake, but she had to find Wedge and let him know that Han had blown the Moana plan. Leia shook her head as she walked. Married more than a year and she felt she understood less and less of her illustrious Corellian Consort.

Leia stopped by a corridor marker and cursed aloud; she was back to square one! She vowed that someday she would figure out the maze of corridors that made up the diplomatic chambers under the palace. It was certainly difficult enough traipsing about under the added weight of eight months' pregnancy. Yes, thought Leia rubbing her swollen stomach with affection, some things Han did to her made life very difficult.

She turned down a corridor she did not remember trying before. The silicon blue walls reflected her passage with indifference as she made her way to the source of a barely audible vacuum intake. Leia sniffed the air, detecting a faint chemical smell she could not identify. Unconsciously, she reached for the pendant hanging at her breast and fingered the glowing blue jewel within the intricate setting. She rounded a bend in the corridor.

She tripped over the body.

At first, Leia thought the clammy blue flesh could not possibly be human. Then, she sat up and peered closely at the pinched features of a face that died in agony. The horror hit and the scream caught in her throat, unable to escape the constrictions of her sudden despair. She inched away from the body, then began to pound the floor with her fists, shaking her head violently and sobbing without sound. Finally, she tilted her head back and screamed a name.

Han. Han. Han.

* * *

On the planet Keeis, Chewbacca and Lando Calrissian ducked down behind a rocky outcropping, narrowly missing discovery by a deacon stationed near their hiding place. The two rebels cautiously peered over the stone's edge and gazed down at the masses huddled in the desert valley below. In one great voice, eerily similar in timbre, the Keeisks chanted to the dead. They chanted and lit candles, they chanted and sacrificed bovine creatures, they chanted and bent to pray. They chanted a name.

Skywalker. Skywalker. Skywalker.

* * *

Han did not attend the funeral or the burial at space. After seeing to the preparations, Solo had returned to the palace and sat in the receiving room to await Leia's return. He stared out the arched window at the Muaven sun riding high in an auburn sky, and let the bright light burn back into him a feeling of loss. He pictured again and again the sight he beheld when he had found them. Wedge's body, turned entirely blue by the poison gas, lying in grotesque agony on the corridor floor. At his side was Leia, rocking back and forth on her knees, still whimpering Han's name. That she called to Han rather than to Wedge was something Solo found more surprising than finding the young lieutenant dead. Ribak Tyne had made a conspicuous solo appearance at the Council meeting, and that was proof enough that he and his Dark Lord were up to no good.

Han felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned in his chair, but no one stood to receive his gaze.

"Don't worry, Han," said a voice bathed in serenity. "Wedge is with me and he's all right. He always will be."

Han resolutely turned back in his chair. "Leave me alone now, Luke. You're the last person I want to talk to."

The air in the room shimmered in the dusty light. "Some destinies are made, some are unmakeable."

"Wedge doesn't have a destiny anymore."

"I don't mean Wedge."

Han stood up and raked the room with his eyes. "Leave me alone, dammit!"

The Corellian felt the air around him sigh, felt the whisper of a breeze slip past, felt alone. He shook his head. Damn the Force and the haunting visits it conjured.

Solo returned to his chair and did not move from it for a long time, even when Leia entered carrying the lightsaber that had once belonged to Wedge, and before him, Luke, and before him, Luke's father. She reverently placed it in Han's lap. "I think," she said softly, "Wedge would have wanted you to have this."

Without a word, Han handed it back to her. He stared at her briefly, hazel eyes registering no emotion, then he returned his gaze to the sun that was now setting over the far hills past the Dersu plain.

Leia attached the weapon to the belt that gathered her dark cloak of mourning about her. She joined Han watching the sunset, took a deep breath and spoke as calmly as her feelings would allow. "It was beautiful. The pod shot away from our ship trailing silver sparks and then it exploded in a...a burst of red and gold and--Han, it was beautiful." Standing close to his chair, she absently ran her fingers through her husband's hair. "All his life, Wedge longed to live among the stars and now he's part of them. There's an irony there somewhere, isn't there?"

The Prince Consort looked up at his Princess, his features a mask of ice. "No irony, Leia. Just death."

Han could not bear the hurt he saw on her face then and he turned away, but Leia knelt in front of him and took his hands into her own. She watched his face, seeking any sign of the sorrow she hoped they shared. For a moment a glimmer of tenderness, a fleeting sadness, crossed his features, but it was gone in an instant. Leia bowed her head and slowly stood up.

"I wish," she said quietly, "you would share your feelings about the accident."

Suddenly afire, Han jumped to his feet and faced Leia square on, his eyes blazing with an intensity Leia had never seen before. "Do you really think Wedge died in an accident? Do you really believe that Dehric gas main imploded at that particular moment in that particular area with absolutely no one else around? Do you?"

Leia's lower lip quivered. "Don't talk to me about Wedge, we were friends all our lives. You can't even begin to know my grief--"

"We're not talking about grief." His words cut her short, severing whatever sentiment remained of their conversation. "I'm talking assassination."

The Princess dealt with the pain that welled up in her in the manner to which she was accustomed. She drew herself up and steeled Solo with an angry look. "I'm no fool, Han. I know something underhanded may have taken place, but first of all, we've no proof and," she raised her hand to halt Han's protest, "second of all, we both know Wedge wouldn't say one word about the plan to establish a secret Jedi enclave on Moana. It'd be useless for someone to try to--"

"It was Vader."

"Vader was off-world."

"We don't know that. Besides, his henchman Tyne walked into the Council meeting and sat in Wedge's chair. He's never far from Vader's side. They'll kill us all yet."

"You're over-reacting." Leia sighed wearily and shook her head. "My love, I know you're under a lot of pressure. Reorganizing an entire galaxy is no small task, and any new government is bound to come up against a few dissenters, to make a few enemies. But just because we allow a few Imperials to facilitate the change-over to Alliance control is no reason to become paranoid and think every ally who dies an untimely death has been murdered. We won the war. Things have changed."

"Do you believe that?" said Han with a bitter chuckle.

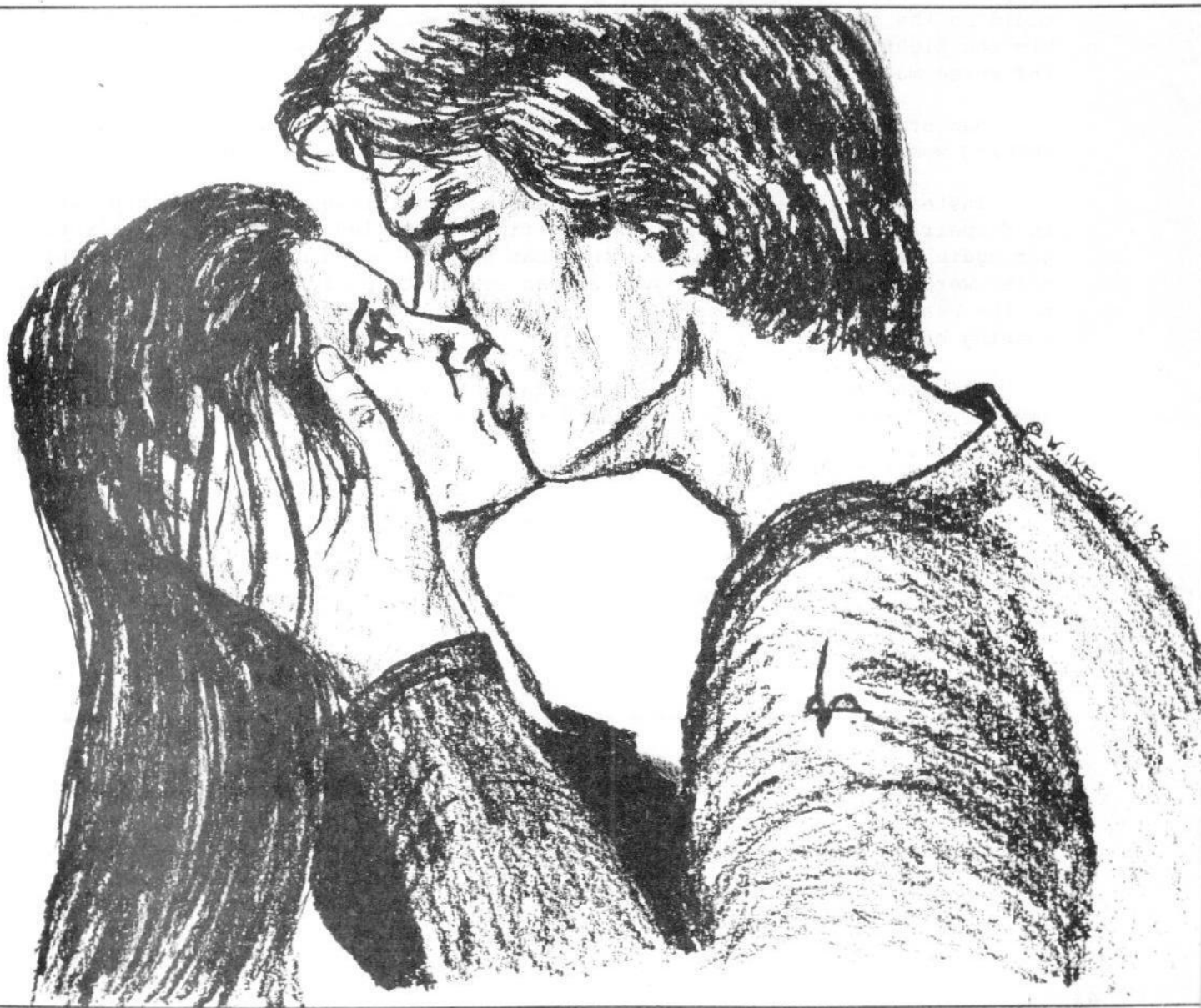
Leia inhaled deeply and then let out a shaky breath. "I have to."

"Yeah, like you have to believe the Force is the almighty answer to all our problems."

Leia's eyes widened, realization slowly dawning on her incredulous countenance. "So that's the real reason why you let the VLON Cartel have Moana. You didn't even want the enclave and Moana--"

"Could be another Dagobah, Leia? Another mystical stomping ground for Jedi masters, disembodied or otherwise?" Han snatched his cloak off the back of his chair and threw it over his shoulder. "No thanks."

He started to step past her, but the Princess reached up and gently turned his face to hers. "After everything that's happened," she said with genuine sorrow, "you still don't believe in the Force?"



Han took his wife by the shoulders and gave her a little shake. "But, I do believe in the Force." He turned away, feeling stricken by his next words. "I fear it."

"There's nothing to fear. Vader is powerless."

Han whirled on her. "Is he?"

"He's just one being--"

"Godammit, Leia," said Han throwing his cloak to the floor, "I'm telling you it's more than that!"

The Princess reached up and stroked his cheek with the back of her hand, her imploring eyes begging him for an answer. "Then tell me what it is. What are you so afraid of? Tell me."

The child you carry, for one. Han's thoughts chased around the darkest corners of his mind. How could you tell a mother that the child she bears could be the seed of their ultimate salvation--or downfall? What had Luke told him the night of its conception? Was it a warning or was it something else? The Force made living so damn complex.

Han stared at Leia, his love. His eyes searched hers for the vulnerable, sobbing woman he'd enfolded in his arms only yesterday. He wanted to tell her.

Instead he seized her in a tight embrace and kissed her hard, in passion, in despair. He twined her hair in his fingers, pulled her closer and kissed her again, seeking the understanding that had once been his Leia. Her surprised cries were smothered by his mouth as Han sought to pull her even closer, nearer to the heart that ached for her, but her distended belly pressed him hard, pushing him away.

Finally, breathless, he released her. Before he could turn away again, Leia saw the glisten in his eyes and heard the tremble in his voice.

"I can't," he said and walked away.

* * *

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Due to assorted queries, I present this short zine "chronology" of the TAILS OF SCHEHERAZADE. THE OLD REPUBLIC READER 1, OUTLAND CHRONICLES 1, FLIP OF A COIN 2, FLIP OF A COIN 1. Force willing, more to follow.

.....

Deadline for submissions to FLIP OF A COIN #3 is October 1, 1983. Send \$3.00 deposit and SASE for final price notification.

KISMET

L. A. Adolf

(kiz'met) n. Turk. qismet from the arabic qismah: lot, fate, destiny

Marcus Brody paused on the stoop of the clapboard cottage, scooping up the morning paper in a fluid motion. He looked at the rolled newsprint briefly, as though debating the wisdom of carrying it into the house. Resolutely, he tucked it under his arm and moved forward to knock on the cottage door.

Marion has never been one to avoid reality... he reflected sadly as the door opened and further thought was cancelled.

"Marcus!" Marion Ravenwood Jones exclaimed in genuine surprise and delight. She looked haggard, her young face lined by exhaustion and grief.

"I was on my way to the Museum, Marion," Marcus offered by way of explanation. He looked at Marion closely, adding, "I wanted to stop by and see if there was anything you need..."

"Oh, please, Marcus. Come in. I'm a damned fool keeping you standing out in the cold," Marion replied, gesturing him into the house.

Marcus smiled and stepped into the house. The hallway was littered with stacks of boxes, empty and full. Brody picked his way carefully through them.

"I'm sorry about this mess. I've been trying to pack away Indy's things. I've got quite a bit ready for the Museum and more for the College. And there's a few things I know he wanted you to have," Marion offered, gesturing Marcus into the study and the only clear space in the house.

"I'll arrange for everything to be picked up," Marcus replied, his eyes taking in the room that had most typified Indiana Jones--filled with books, artifacts, documents, mementoes gathered over his archaeological career--that was now as bereft of his presence as the world of the living. "Can I help you with this, Marion? You don't have to do it all alone."

Marion turned on the lamp, better illuminating the room and driving back the early morning gloom. Marcus noted for the first time that she was still garbed in nightclothes, an oversized robe he recognized as Indiana's wrapped around her slender form. She looked somehow small and childlike and no matter how hard she tried to be otherwise, vulnerable.

"No, Marcus, it is something I have to do myself," she said softly. "It helps me remember that he's dead, that he isn't just off on one of his adventures. If I pack everything away, give it away, dispose of it, I can remember he won't be coming back." Marion drew a ragged breath, "I wake up in the middle of the night, Marcus, convinced he's still there, beside me. I can feel him there. I can almost forget. I want to forget. This helps me remember."

"I understand," Marcus said, nodding solemnly. He wondered, as he often had, at the great emotional strength Marion possessed. Another woman might have been utterly destroyed by the tragedy that had come to Marion at what should have been the happiest, most unblemished time in her life. She and Indiana had finally made it official--many tumultuous years too late--in a quiet, late summer ceremony. They had departed on a honeymoon that had been typically Indiana's in plan and execution, incorporating tradition with an archaeological dig on the West Coast. Within weeks of their return to Connecticut, Indiana had grown desperately ill. Now, short months after their marriage, Marion Ravenwood Jones, late summer's bride, was mid-winter's widow.

Some had called it a curse--the occupational hazard of archaeologists--the inescapable will of the dead whose graves had been disturbed, retribution for sacrilegious intrusion. The less superstitious cited long dormant pathogen, buried with their ancient victims, patiently waiting for revival and finding it in the dusty turmoil of archaeological excavation and the reunion with living tissue. Marcus could not decide which school of thought he subscribed to. He was a scientist and bound to the world of provable reality, but he had lived too long and pursued his own archaeological career too far and wide not to have learned to respect the ancient beliefs and appreciate the value of superstition.

"You know something, Marcus?" Marion said suddenly, "That bastard was an archaeologist to the end. You know what his last words to me were about?"

"No," Marcus looked at Marion searchingly.

"The Ark. That god cursed Ark of the Covenant. Not a final farewell. Not an 'I love you, Marion.' It was something about that goddamned Ark." Marion replied, her tone almost bitter. Then sadly, wistfully, she added, "He never expected to die. I think he figured on getting out of the hospital and trying to liberate it from the government. Dying wasn't on his agenda."

"No, he'd cheated death too often," Marcus agreed, "He led a charmed life."

"'And all they who live by archaeology, shall perish by archaeology,'" Marion paraphrased distractedly. "Damn him."

Marcus understood the need for her anger and knew the catharsis it would eventually bring. He made no comment. Instead he allowed his eyes to travel the room, coming to rest on an object on the mantelpiece. An urn. Indy's ashes.

"Marion," he began, hesitating to give voice to the thought that had entered his mind, "is there anything you would like me to do? If I can't help here, perhaps I can make some arrangements for you..."

Marion, despite her seeming distraction, understood his meaning immediately. She shot a quick glance over to the urn.

"No!" she said sharply. Realizing the vehemence of her reply, she looked sheepish, then hastened to explain. "Not in winter, Marcus. Not when the ground is so cold. Indy always seemed to belong to summer. It can wait until then."

"Yes, it can wait," Marcus replied. He rose smiling encouragingly. "If there is anything I can do, Marion, let me know. I'll always be here. Anytime you need me."

"I know, Marcus. I will, I promise. You were always Indy's best friend. He thought so much of you. I value that friendship too." Marion moved to Brody, enveloping him in a hug which he returned awkwardly. "You've done so much already. Thank you." She pulled back from him, mouth smiling but eyes glistening with tears.

"Give me a call at the Museum when you have things ready for transfer," Marcus said gruffly, eyes batting back a bit of mist of their own, "I'll see that someone comes to pick them up."

"I will, and here," Marion turned and hurried over to the desk, "Indy would have wanted you to have these things." She extended a largish box with an ornate lid, "Please take them."

Marcus Brody nodded and accepted the box gratefully, never realizing that the movement caused him to drop the newspaper he had held beneath his arm. He moved to the door, Marion following.

"Remember, Marion, any time," he repeated.

Marion nodded and watched Brody walk out of the house and climb into his car. She stood framed in the doorway, watching until the vehicle pulled out of sight. Suddenly chilled by the brisk morning air, she returned to the study.

Her eyes fell upon the rolled up newspaper on the floor where Marcus had dropped it unwittingly. She bent, picked it up and from force of habit, snapped it open.

The headline leapt off the page at her.

MARSHALL COLLEGE PROF MOURNED BY TOWN

the banner exclaimed above a small and not too clear picture of Indiana Jones. Marion felt suddenly and unaccountably weak, as though she had been struck by a sharp physical blow.

A memorial service was held Saturday at the Marshall College chapel for Indiana Jones, Ph.D., long a Marshall College professor of Archaeology. Dr. Jones died Thursday after a three-month illness...

Marion felt her chest constrict, a tightening that crawled inexorably upward to her throat, threatening to strangle her. The memorial service...she remembered it vaguely through dulled senses. The comforting presence of Marcus Brody, who

had arranged it. The press of dozens of hands against her own. The murmurs of dozens of sorrowful and sympathetic voices. The final descent of peace and darkness as she had fainted for the first time in her life into Marcus's strong, steady arms...

"God damn you, Indiana Jones!" Marion spun around to face the urn on the mantelpiece, crushing the newspaper to her chest, "Why did you do this to me?!"

She sank onto the edge of the couch, burying her face in her arms, curling up into a ball. An almost animal sob escaped from her throat, followed by a rush of tears that she was too tired to suppress any longer. Letting go, she allowed herself to be swept away by the torrent, aware only of her pain and a sense of loss that all the tears she would ever cry could not wash away.

After a time, Marion became aware of a sound. Persistent, it intruded on her grief, demanding attention. She uncurled, realizing belatedly it was the telephone. With startling ease, she forced away her tears and sobbing--the habit of a lifetime that had allowed her little leisure for her feelings--and wiping her wet cheeks with a sleeve of the robe, she rushed to the desk to pick up the receiver.

"Yes, this is Mrs. Marion Jones," she responded to the voice at the other end of the connection. "Yes, the results of my tests. Yes, I am listening." Marion held her breath--the tests that Marcus had insisted upon after her fainting spell at the memorial service. "Yes, I understand. Wonderful news. Yes, I will be in touch to make appointments. Soon. I want everything to go all right, too. Thank you."

Marion cradled the phone abruptly and swung once again to face the urn. "Well, Indy! You managed to top yourself this time. Damn you!!" Marion was consumed by a sudden rage, "Last time you left me with a broken heart and that was bad enough!" She stepped forward to the mantelpiece, taking the urn between her two hands, "Now you've left me pregnant!"

She walked a few steps back across the room, turning to face the fireplace once again. She juggled the urn in her hands as though to test its weight against her strength.

"I thought you'd done all you possibly could to my life when I was fifteen years old. You didn't leave me pregnant then, Indy. God knows not for lack of trying, you son-of-a-bitch..." She held the urn up to eye level, looking at the ornate jar with absolute contempt. "You bastard. Burying you in Connecticut is too damned good for you."

Bringing the urn up to her chest and flexing her arms, she was overcome with the uncontrollable desire to fling the funerary vessel against the mantelpiece with all her strength. She wanted it to smash into a thousand pieces, and the ashes to scatter irretrievably about the study...

"What the hell do I think I'm doing?!" Sanity and reason returned to her abruptly, "Why take it out on the urn? Just one more mess of yours I'd have to pick up the pieces of." She gave a short, bitter laugh, "Damn."

Slowly, she walked back to the mantelpiece and replaced the urn. She moved to the couch and sat down once again. "Damn you and archaeology to hell, Indy," she breathed, her energy spent, "damn you both."



Archaeology. Marion had lost everyone she'd loved in the name of archaeology. Indiana for the first time when she was fifteen--infatuated and blind to the fact that the object of her absorption had a first love--a love impossible to compete with for she was an art, not a woman. Then Abner, who in his single-minded quest for the Art of the Covenant, had taken her halfway around the world only to die, consumed by his obsession. Now, after brief months of long overdue happiness, archaeology had taken Indiana from her again, irretrievably. Archaeology, how she loathed the word. Her possessive rival had called upon the gods to exact retribution for Indiana's infidelity, denying him the quick death-in-quest of Abner, Forrestal and Belloq. Instead, the fates had decreed an unfitting death, an ancient disease that killed by degrees and wasted robust bodies away. It hadn't mattered that Marion had resigned herself to sharing her love with her old rival, it had mattered not at all. Archaeology had demanded total devotion and those that had resisted paid the price.

But I've cheated you, mistress Archaeology. This time I'm going to have the last word...

"I'm carrying Indy's child," Marion stated simply, as though the fact in its full impact had occurred to her for the first time.

Just let archaeology try to take him from me.

Marion curled up on the couch once again, drawing Indiana's old robe around her tightly. The faint scent of Indiana's aftershave wafted up to greet her from where it still clung stubbornly to the cloth of the garment. Marion closed her eyes and savored the scent, wrapping her arms around herself to keep this last reminder of her husband enveloped about her.

She felt a strong sense of comfort for the first time in many days.

* * *

The air in the house was already warm as Sallah finished his dawn prayers and folded away the well-worn prayer rug. The day to come would be hot, even for Egypt. Sallah stepped up towards the balcony of his home to savor the last cool air of the day and watch the beautiful city of Cairo come awake.

Sallah paused at the top of the stairs that led to the balcony, drawing a chestful of the fresh morning air. He released it heartily, continuing his progress onto the balcony proper. As he swung to face the streetward side of the structure, his eyes fell upon a small figure already at the balcony railing, watching the gathering bustle of the city below with youthful intensity.

"Nothing more beautiful than a Cairo dawn, eh, young Marcus?" Sallah addressed the young boy in English, keeping his voice low and gentle, wary of startling the child.

With perfect composure, Marcus Ravenwood Jones turned, his face illuminated by a lopsided grin as he beheld Sallah.

"No, nothing!" he replied in English. Pausing and pointing downward at the street below, he continued in flawless Arabic, "Help me to see, Sallah!"

Laughing, Sallah scooped the youngster up in his strong arms. The boy threw a companionable arm around the Arab's neck and gave his mentor a fond look before he peered over the balcony railing. His face became a study in absorbed curiosity.

Sallah regarded the boy's profile in the gathering light. He was amazed as always by the uncanny resemblance to Indiana Jones he saw in the child's features--a likeness intensified by the familiar look of inquisitiveness now animating them.

Life goes on. There is the proof.

Sallah had once tried to comfort Indiana in his grief over what they had supposed was Marion's death using those words and his own children as an example. Now here, fresh from America, was Indiana's small child, bring his words and his lesson back to him. Sallah moved forward to greet Marion and her son to his home.

The young child leaned out of Marion's arms at Sallah's approach, regarding the Arab delightedly. Much to Sallah's surprise, the boy extended his arms in the universal child's appeal for a hug.

Marion laughed. "That is unusual for Marcus. Better not discourage him, Sallah," she smiled encouragingly, holding the youngster out to him. Grinning, Sallah gathered the child in his arms, an instant bond developing between them at the physical contact. The child encircled the Arab's neck with his arms, embracing him enthusiastically in the manner of friends long parted.

Marion shook her head. "Love at first sight," she commented, laughing wryly.

Touched, Sallah managed a misty grin. He gave the child a sidelong look as young Marcus Ravenwood Jones leaned back to regard him affectionately. Charmed by the look, Sallah's tender heart melted. Young Marcus laid his head against the Arab's shoulder, looking at him with Indiana's hazel eyes, with Indiana's lopsided grin on his small features.

"Sallah," the boy said softly, "My good friend Sallah."

"Sallah," Marcus's voice brought Sallah back to the present, "Sallah, when are we going to go see Imam again?"

Sallah looked at the child, noting the expression of eagerness on the youthful features. Marcus was always begging to visit the house of Imam. He was perpetually eager to see and talk with the strange old priest-scholar-astronomer, always intrigued and drawn to the documents, the artifacts--the knowledge--with which the old man surrounded himself.

"Perhaps later," Sallah said, setting Marcus down, "It will be a busy day."

Satisfied, the boy nodded and moved off, instantly absorbed by a scarab, which unaccountably was crawling on the balcony railing.

Old beyond his years...Sallah reflected. The child was a perfect mirror of his father not only in looks, he shared a curiosity and intensity about knowledge and its pursuit, that his relationship with Imam typified. What was more amazing than the mere fact of Marcus's fascination with Imam was that the boy seemed, despite his tender years, to comprehend things that Imam told him, often mentioning a subject they had discussed long afterward, or relating it to a totally different set of circumstances. The boy was much brighter, more articulate and perceptive a youngster than any other Sallah had known. Sometimes the Arab could well understand Marion's uneasiness about the child, comprehend the sense of strangeness she had been all too aware of and alarmed by.

"He knows the strangest things, Sallah." Marion spoke softly, hesitantly, "Marcus Brody gave him a toy for Christmas. It was a toy Noah's ark, with all the little animals. When he heard it was an Ark, he looked at it and said, 'It's not the real ark. It's not the Ark of the Covenant.' Sallah, I had never mentioned the Ark of the Covenant to him, neither had Marcus Brody. I've never sent him to Sunday school. How did he know there was such a thing?"

Sallah has shrugged, "Perhaps a playmate, a friend of yours, the radio..."

"No, he doesn't play with children his own age, he watches them. No one except Brody would know anything of the Ark. I've always listened to the radio with him and I've never heard the Ark mentioned." Marion paused, "Sometimes I

look at him, Sallah, hoping to see some part of me in him. Any part of me. I never do. He has Indy's coloring, Indy's eyes, Indy's hair, Indy's mannerisms-- I swear it. Sometimes he frightens me..." she paused, shivering noticeably--as though chilled to the bone--and continued in an undertone, "it's almost as if he is not of this...earth..."

Sallah looked at Marion closely, noting her distracted mien. Unsure if he had been meant to hear her words, he did not respond. Instead, his thoughts carried him back in time, to the memory of what had brought Indiana Jones and Marion Ravenwood to Egypt before, and what Indiana had written him had happened after they had left. Two parents, exposed to the power of the Ark of the Covenant. It was not surprising that there was a touch of preternaturalism about the child. Exposed, yet spared...but had Indiana truly been spared? Death had always surrounded the Ark, no one knew its secrets, the extent of its power. Its affect on the child...

Sallah had had opportunities to learn whereof Marion spoke in regard to her child. Later, at the Tanis dig, fulfilling the purpose that had brought Marion and her son to Egypt--the scattering of Indiana's ashes at the site of his greatest archaeological find--Sallah had noticed the child's fascination with his surroundings.

Marcus had watched the proceedings with wide eyes and intense curiosity. Sallah had noted the boy's absorption and had come over to him, wondering how the child was perceiving the simple ritual. He stooped down to the small figure, garbed in a hand-me-down burnoose borrowed from one of Sallah's youngest children.

"What do you think of this, young Marcus?" he had asked the boy.

"Daddy's happy to be here, but he misses the Ark," the child had said simply, mysteriously and in perfect earnestness.

"How do you know, young one?" Sallah had asked, dumbfounded.

"I know," Marcus had stated simply, as though the two words explained all and everything.

Sallah had been sure that Marion had not witnessed the exchange and he had resolved not to mention it to her, not wanting to compound her sense of confusion about the child she dearly loved but could not understand. Indiana had been much on her mind that day, it was possible that the child had overheard something she had said and was merely repeating it back to Sallah, but the Arab could not be sure.

"I don't even know why I insisted on cremation," Marion said as they reentered Sallah's house, shaking the dust of the long drive out of her clothing. She stood listening for a moment to the distant chattering of Sallah's children as they played on the balcony above the room, "and then," she continued, her tone perplexed, "I kept the goddamned ashes around the house for years. People thought I'd gone nuts--except for Marcus Brody that is. The widow and the ashes. But it just didn't seem right to bury Indiana in Connecticut."

"You've done the right thing," Sallah said soothingly. Indy did somehow belong to Tanis, his ashes mingling with the ancient dust.

"Yes," Marion replied, "I have a strong sense of that now. I kept delaying burial in Connecticut. First I wanted to wait for summer because it seemed too cruel to bury him in cold earth. When summer came, I found another excuse. Then one day, I finally knew what I was going to do. The pull had always been there and I finally realized it. Indiana belonged in Egypt, in Tanis. I had to get him there. Brody agreed and put everything together."

Young Marcus had been amusing himself quietly in a corner of the house since they had returned. Suddenly, he moved swiftly across the room, in hot pursuit of an object. Emitting a triumphant noise, the child captured his prize, then hurried over to Sallah with it, his small face animated by a look of triumph. He extended his hand to reveal a scarab, the sacred beetle of the ancients. This specimen was alive and kicking, and Sallah inspected it dutifully, more entranced by the look of familiar, self-confident triumph on the youngster's features. He smiled approvingly at the boy and turned to Marion, his own eyes alight with wonder.

"He's so like Indy!" he commented, without thinking about the words he spoke. He regretted them immediately when he saw the look of uncertainty come over Marion's features.

Before she could make comment, the raucous noise of two of Sallah's youngest children clambering down the steps and into the living area of the house intruded upon them. Their manners forgotten in the heat of their game, they carried their play into the house without seeming to realize where they were. Marcus, immediately attracted by the rough and tumble, hurried over and, to his mother's astonishment, joined the game. The merriment did not lose a single beat, Sallah's children accepted him without question.

"He doesn't play with other children at home," Marion said wonderingly, watching her son in amazement. Sallah, transfixed by her reaction, made no move to correct his offspring's breach of manners. Instead he turned to watch Marcus gambol with his children. Still clothed in the burnoose he had requested to be dressed in that morning, young Marcus Ravenwood Jones seemed uniquely at home.

He looks like he belongs here, Sallah thought to himself wonderingly.

"Looks like he belongs here, doesn't he?" Marion said suddenly, suppressing a shudder. She looked from the child to Sallah. Sallah returned her look briefly. Finding the eye contact suddenly uncomfortable, they both looked away.

Marion stood abruptly. "I'm very tired, Sallah. Excuse me."

Marion had retreated to the privacy of her room and neither Sallah or his family had seen much of her for the rest of the day. When she had emerged from her room, she had been very affectionate with her son, but otherwise strangely distracted and distant.

The next morning, Marion was gone.

Sallah had proceeded to exhaust every possibility of finding Marion. He had spent months in futile attempts to locate her through official and unofficial channels. Failing, he had begun to write letters to her, sending them to the

only address he had had for her, the college in Connecticut. He had never received a response, nor had the letters been returned. There had been no way of knowing if Marion had ever received them.

Yet, he persisted. Sallah had never fancied himself a correspondent, although he had often wished he had been better suited to that role during his friendship with Indiana. He knew his grasp of the intricacies of written English did not precisely match his aptitude for the spoken word. However, the exigency of the situation made whatever literary polish he possessed irrelevant.

Through it all, he had managed to maintain his equanimity as well. He had not wondered and worried over Marion's seeming abandonment of the child, he knew deep in his soul that that description of Marion's action had no relevance to the truth of the matter. Marion had loved the child absolutely, despite her sometimes overwhelming feelings about his singularity. She could no more have abandoned the child than she could have willed her own heart to stop beating. Sallah had considered it a matter of having left her child for safekeeping in his care. He knew it with the conviction of another parent that Marion would return. It had not been an accident that had drawn her to return Indy here and it was no more an accident or an irresponsible whim that had caused her to leave her son behind. Egypt was where the boy belonged. The sense of destiny had been in the air from that day in Tanis. Sallah could only wonder at the strength of a conviction so powerful as to supplant the natural instinct of a mother to cleave to her child. He knew neither he nor Fayah possessed the kind of strength of will necessary, even if the child's welfare was dependent on the sacrifice. Sallah could only guess at the personal cost of what she had done.

Later, they would go to the house of Imam, Sallah thought, looking at young Marcus suddenly. Marion had entrusted her son's spiritual development to him and he would not shirk the duty. In this land of ageless wisdom and living history, Marion had found a source of guidance for her child that she could not give and might possibly inhibit. Sallah knew this to be true, although he could not say just how he knew. He knew it like he knew the cycles of the Nile and the natural rhythms of his homeland. As Marion had come to know her destiny and that of her son.

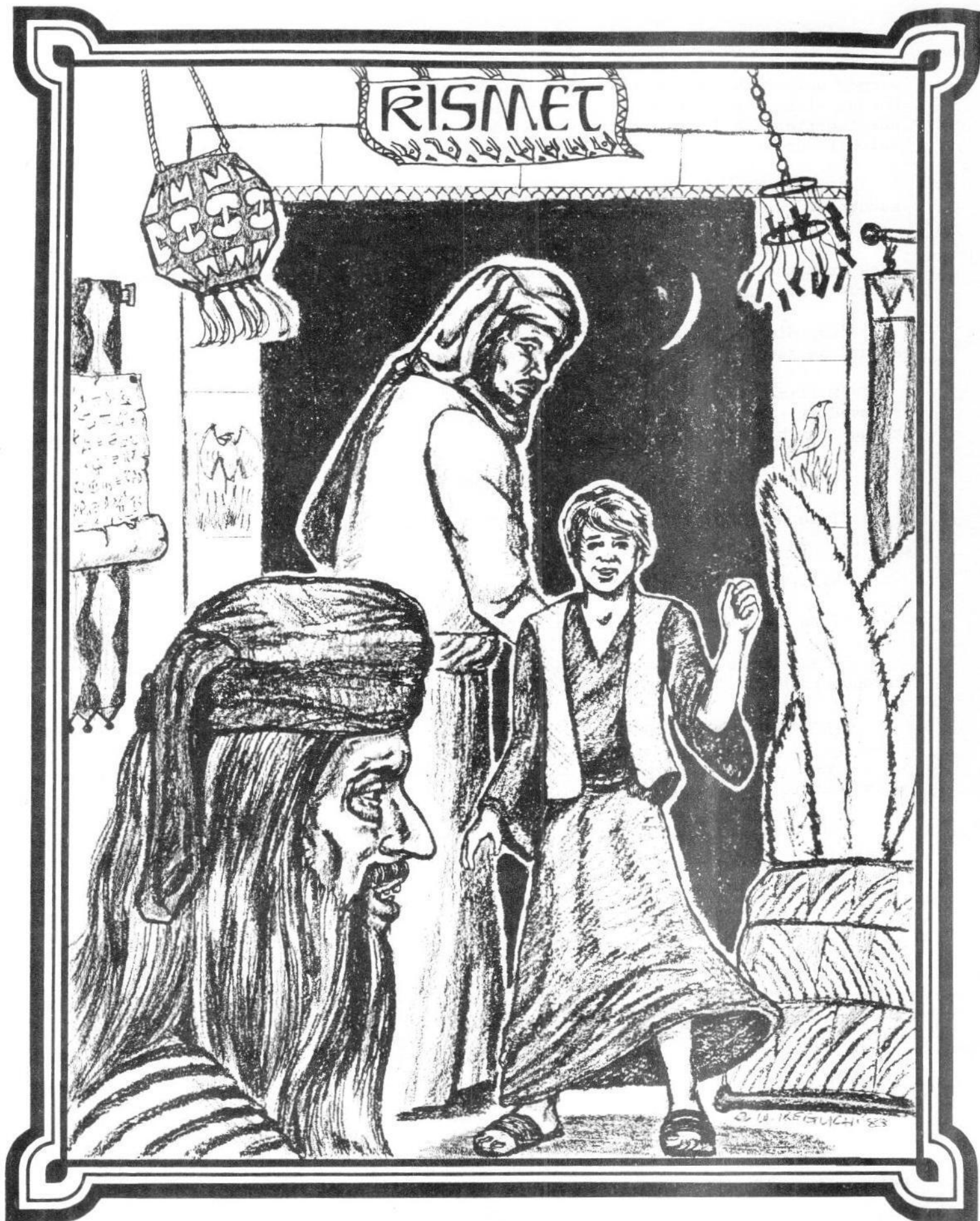
How proud of Marcus Marion will be, Sallah thought as he looked at the boy wonderingly. He had grown so amazingly and in such a short time in so many more ways than physically. *How proud she will be when she returns.* He had never harbored a doubt of her return, not from the moment he had seen her empty room and realized what she had done. *Perhaps in a year, perhaps two...*

In the meantime, there was a day's work to be done, and Imam to be visited. First, however, Sallah had another letter to write.

* * *

Imam's house was quiet, except for the occasional musical notes of wind chimes. The air was heavy-laden with incense, stirred only slightly by the evening's first breeze. Outside the circular window, beyond the telescope, chimes danced fitfully in the alternating desert wind.

Marcus Ravenwood Jones sat before the wise old man whose house this was. He had wanted to come much earlier, but Sallah had been too busy with work and



family to take him before evening prayers. Sallah had dropped him off what seemed only minutes ago, promising to come back for him well before bedtime. Marcus wished that the short hours would stretch themselves out magically. He was impatient to learn and there seemed so much to absorb and so little time in which to do it.

"Imam, where is the Ark of the Covenant? Do you know?" Marcus asked suddenly. He looked at his teacher hopefully.

"Your father took it to America," Imam responded. He did not lift his eyes from the roll of papyrus in his hands, which he had been studying since Marcus's arrival.

"Why did my father take it?" Marcus asked. He could never find out enough about the fabled Ark. From his earliest memories, he had been fascinated by it.

"Evil men wanted it for evil purposes," Imam explained. "Your father removed it for...safekeeping." Imam replied as though the Ark were the farthest thing from his mind and interest.

"Do they still want it? Is the danger gone?"

"I do not know. I don't think so," Imam replied, not specifying which question he was addressing.

"Will the Ark be returned?"

"I do not think so, young one," Imam responded distractedly.

"The legends say that the Ark would be found when the true Messiah comes," Marcus prompted, "Is that happening?"

"Those who should know tell me that it is not. The signs are not yet complete."

"Then it was wrong to take the Ark. It should be put back," Marcus announced with youthful conviction.

"Perhaps, young one, perhaps." Imam settled back to studying his papyrus scroll.

"You said my father took it to America, Imam. Where in America? Who has it?" Marcus was the picture of childish intensity.

"Later. Read this to me." Imam held out the papyrus scroll to the youngster. Imam knew he was not asking the impossible of the boy. His pupil carried the names of three archaeologists and the blood of two flowed through his veins. Imam had honored them by teaching the boy to read hieroglyphics and translate them before he had begun to master written English or Arabic.

Marcus studied the papyrus scroll for a few minutes.

"Read it as it is written," Imam elaborated, noting the child's hesitation.

"*Nuk bennu enti em Annu...*" Marcus began, "'I am the phoenix which is in Heliopolis...'"

"Do you know what a phoenix is?" Imam interrupted.

"A beautiful lone bird which lived for hundreds of years. It died in fire, then rose from its own ashes to begin another long life."

"Excellent, young one!" Imam exclaimed, "Continue."

"*Nuk ari sapu en enti unen...*" Marcus paused, then translated, "'I am the keeper of the book of that which is and of that which shall be...'"

"Good. Go on."

"*Nuk heru. Heru put net hra atef-f.* I am Horus. Horus is the avenger of his father."

"Do you know who Horus is?"

"Horus was the son of Osiris and Isis. He was born of Isis in her grief for Osiris and occupied his father's throne." The child's face brightened suddenly, "He was born like I was, after my father died."

Imam favored the boy with a gentle smile. "Yes, very good young one!" And how came Isis to grieve for Osiris?"

"Osiris died a cruel death, caused by the powers of evil," Marcus replied. "My father died a cruel death. Like Osiris?"

Imam shrugged noncommittedly, "Who is Osiris?"

"King of eternity, master of the heavenly Nile. The soul that lives again, the being that becomes a child again," Marcus elaborated, then added, "My father was an archaeologist."

"Do you see a resemblance, even so?" Imam asked.

"Yes. Something tells me yes. I don't know what."

"That is as it should be. Read more to me."

"*Nuk bennu i-n en maa na seru setau.* 'I am the phoenix. I have come to see the holy things hidden. *Sem kua er seu amenu.* I shall pass through the holy rites hidden. *Oetet xet seru setau.* I shall take possession of the holy things hidden. *Ere seru her aat.* I shall return the holy things to the burial place. *An xem tau an ari asfet.* I shall not be overthrown by the doer of evil..." Marcus read, a growing sense of wonder coming over him.

"Stop. That is enough young one. Sallah comes for you soon. Take the scroll home. Study it and meditate upon it. We will discuss it later. Tomorrow. And tomorrow." Imam dismissed the session with a wave of his hand.

Marcus realized how late it was only when he heard the sound of Sallah's truck pulling up on the street outside. Tucking the papyrus into his burnoose, he turned to Imam, excitement lighting up his features.

"Who has the Ark, Imam? Where is the Ark in America?" he persisted.

"Study that. Meditate." Imam instructed, then softly, he added. "Remember."

Marcus looked at his teacher sharply, as though a powerful thought had struck him unexpectedly. "Nuk bennu...I am the phoenix..." he breathed, transfixed.

Imam nodded approvingly. "Remember. Remember who has the Ark."

"Marcus," Sallah chided, entering the house, "you haven't been tiring Imam with your endless questions again, have you?"

Marcus's head snapped around to face his mentor. The ethereal atmosphere that had briefly existed in the room was dispelled by Sallah's entrance.

"No, Sallah," Imam replied before the child could speak, "the boy does not tire me. I merely help him to know who he has been, who he is and who he will be. It is not a strain. It is enlightening."

Sallah smiled thoughtfully. "I know what you mean, old friend," he said softly. "Come, Marcus, it is late," the big Arab announced, extending a hand to his charge. Marcus hurried over to his guardian, accepting the gesture. The two moved to the entryway of the house. Sallah went ahead, stepping out into the street. Marcus paused for a moment, looking back to his teacher.

"Nuk bennu, Imam!" he said triumphantly, "The Ark is in the capital of America! Nuk bennu!"

The evening wind rushed through the open door, chasing itself to the great round window across the room. With a shudder of wind chimes, it was gone.

So was the boy.

* * *

Marion sat at the table, the stack of letters piled up before her. "Marcus, dear Marcus Brody," Marion said, smiling, putting the fifth letter aside. No sooner had she sent Marcus Brody her address than he had bundled up the letters and sent them to her. No questions asked, no explanations demanded for the period of time he had heard nothing of or from her.

Marion realized she should have let Marcus Brody know where she had gone on her return from Egypt. He should have been in her full confidence from the start. She owed him so much, a fact poorly repaid by the simple act of naming her son for him. He had looked after her in the dim days after Indy had died, had stood by her during her pregnancy. He had understood so many things, and she was sure he would have understood why she had left her child in Egypt. Marcus had always looked after her interests, even before her marriage to Indiana, just as he had looked out for Indiana when he had had neither the time or inclination to do so himself. The extra insurance policy that Brody had acquired through the college for his wayward comrade, coupled with the remnants of the government settlement for the recovery of the Ark had enabled Marion to live comfortably before her trip to Egypt and had allowed her the freedom to relocate upon her return.

I'll see Marcus Brody very soon, she thought, and explain all the reasons for needing this time alone. She might even be able to go back to Connecticut,

and be able to return to the house that she and Indy had shared. From there she would plan her return to Egypt, to visit her son--the world war permitting. She had made her peace with the past. Many things were possible now.

The time alone had been as vital as oxygen was to life. She had needed time and distance to put between herself and the memory that now was all that remained of Indiana Jones. After years of learning to hate him for the indiscretion of their youth, the reawakening of a never dead love had stripped away her protective shell. She had grown vulnerable in more ways than she had realized.

Slowly, gradually, she had recognized the danger she had faced from herself following Indy's death. She had begun the slow process of wrapping herself in what had been her husband until her memories had threatened to drive her over the edge. Leaving Marshall College behind, she had been able to become her own person again, reaffirm her identity separate from her husband. Now she once more was someone more than just Dr. Jones's widow. She was secure in resuming her life and love of Indiana Jones.

It had not been an easy battle. Since her separation from her son, the full force of her loss of Indiana had hit her. The grief that she had not had the time to indulge with a small child to look after had caught up with her. The backlash had been inevitable and she had at times been thankful that Marcus had not still been in her care. There had been times during this period that she had not been able to take care of herself, let alone her child.

Marion looked at the stack of letters from Sallah once again. Only one tome now remained unopened. She reached out, picked up the envelope and laid it before her. She studied it for a moment, savoring the fact that this was the last bit of unknown intelligence of her son left in Sallah's care. She noted the postmark. The letter was barely two months old. Tearing the envelope open and unfolding the letter, she began to read.

"...be pleased to know that Marcus speaks Arabic fluently, but that we all coach him in English so that he will not lose his mother tongue. He is a healthy active boy. He is quick of mind and insatiably curious, always at motion, never at rest. You will forgive a change of subject briefly as I tell you of something that has just happened. Discovering a length of rope somewhere around the house, the boy is now flailing and snapping it over his head in the manner of a bullwhip."

Marion suppressed an involuntary shiver, the chill that always overcame her when she recognized something more of Indy in her child. The doubt created itself in her mind that her imagination had run riot with her when she had thought she recognized too much of Indy in the child and none of herself. Guilt had established itself for her action--the sense of rightness she had felt at the moment of her decision had left her simultaneous with leaving Sallah's house.

She often recoiled from the knowledge that she had left her only child in the hands of a man who, for all his close relationship with Indiana and her own abiding trust of him, was a virtual stranger. That she had not been, at certain times since leaving him, capable of caring for Marcus, had done nothing to set her mind at ease.

Through it all, she had missed her child desperately. She had often in the time passed, turned to point something out to him, to share a moment, only to realize that he was not with her. She had found herself wondering how she could have pushed away the one living link with the great love of her life. There had been affirmation of beliefs she had long since forgotten, in the child's similarity to Indiana. Just as the uncanny resemblance had at times frightened her, it had also been a comfort. Had she done the right thing leaving her child half a world away? She had once dared Archaeology, the jealous mistress, to take from her what was left of Indiana. At times she believed she had capitulated the battle without a struggle.

Marion cut her thought off abruptly and returned to the reading of the last letter.

"...great desire for knowledge. He is learning to understand, however, that Imam is old and must rest from time to time. Still, at times, it is difficult to drag him away from the old man's house. Imam, for his part, says he does not mind, not even the child's incessant questions about the Ark of the Covenant..."

The chill descended once again, but she pushed it aside. She could not so easily dismiss the gentle mist that obscured the writing. Blinking, she looked up and across the room, out into the sunshine of a spring day in Washington, D.C.

She had done the right thing.

Epilogue

The tall, sandy-haired young man adjusted his glasses and craned his neck out the bay door of the large government warehouse. He cast a precautionary glance first to the right, then to the left, noting the lack of security in the area with satisfaction. Confidently, he maneuvered the large wooden crate out of the warehouse proper and onto the loading dock.

Marcus Ravenwood Jones breathed in a lungful of crisp Washington, D.C. air and waved at the large, nondescript truck that sat waiting a few hundred yards away from the loading dock. Instantly, the truck's engine jumped to life and backed expertly to the loading ramp. Its driver, a young man slightly older than Marcus and of Arab descent, jumped out of the cab and onto the loading dock. He helped Marcus guide the cumbersome crate into the box of the truck. Together, the two young men secured the object and hastened to the cab.

"Did you have any trouble? Did anyone challenge you?" the young Arab asked as he threw the truck into gear and pulled away from the loading dock.

"None whatsoever. When dealing with the U. S. Government, all you have to remember is to act like you know what you are doing. Mother taught me that. The time she spent in this city made today possible Abdul," Marcus explained.



"Today we honor our fathers, eh, Marcus?" the young Arab said to his companion, "It was they who removed the Ark from the Well of Souls and it will be you and I who return it there."

Marcus shot his friend a lopsided grin. "Yes, Abdul. And we honor ourselves," he replied mysteriously. "Let's get to the airport, eh, old friend?"

"Next stop Tanis?" Abdul asked, smiling a toothy smile.

"You got it," Marcus laughed, "and as quickly as possible. Before they find what I left for them back there. Wonder if they like snakes any better than I do?" Marcus suppressed an involuntary shudder. Abdul laughed heartily.

In the rear of the truck, a low hum emitted from the crate marked TOP SECRET ARMY INTELL. #9906753 DO NOT OPEN, then slowly it subsided.

After many years of vigilant waiting, the contents of the crate knew it was safe to rest. The Ark of the Covenant was on its way home.

* * *

For Jacqueline, in appreciation of her help with stalled plots and spectres of doubt.

SORRY TO

DISAPPOINT...

Three years of fanfic
Say I ought to be dead -
From carbon freeze, Jabba,
Or the holes in my head.

Three years of fanfic
Say I should not survive.
Once I hit Tatooine,
I should not be alive.

Now I hate to destroy
All those great story lines,
But I've thawed out real nice
And I'm feeling just fine!

Jacqueline

Taero





PARADOX

Deckard is a cop.
He has been taught that replicants are
merely advanced machines, to be used,

then "retired" when their usefulness
is ended.

Rachael is one of them.
He should not love her.

But he does.

Rachael is a replicant.
She knows that to humans she is
only an experiment,

that there are those whose sole purpose
is to kill her.

Deckard is one of them.
She should not love him.

But she does.

Barbara Brayton

WHATEVER

HAPPENS...

I see my face reflected in your eyes
As finally you ask me to decide;
And, honey, you know he would stand aside.
But that's the thing that you must realize.
You ask this scoundrel what we both should do,
But when the better part of you stands tall
I know your heart will hear your Jedi call --

Well, you want me to think this out for you.
And just why do you think that Luke is here?
You are the reason he can fight, and win;
You are his courage, all that's best in him,
You're all that's left, all that he can call dear.
We are the past. The future must be bright,
And you and he can build that if you stay,
Letting me leave, while I still can, today,
If you let me, this once, do what is right.
To come between you both would be a crime
That this old pirate won't commit -- and so,
He's waiting for you -- take his hand and go,
And let me be a hero one more time.

no. 2

M.E. Wickes



BLADE RUNNER

I'm not supposed to feel the catch, the pause
That hurts my throat. Blood lust should be so sweet
And bright. But as I panic through the street,
In shadow, dank and grim, I've lost the cause,
The reasoning behind this hot pursuit,
I'm cold. I hurt. I'm not supposed to feel
And yet my soul's dark agony is real--
As real as the replicants I shoot?
I told them my gun wasn't out for hire--
I hurt. No more--my gun won't let me fire--
These introspective thoughts are not for me--
When I return, the blood fresh on my hands,
What will I see in imitation eyes?
Will I be rent by automation's cries?
And will she know just what my job demands?
I'm not supposed to feel the way I do
But then you're not supposed to live. Mind-rape
Is what you've done to me, and no escape
Can be. Against all hope, I still want you.

M. E. Wickes



GUNHAND OF CIRCUMSTANCE

J A Berger

Starring:

HARRISON FORD as TOMMY LILLARD
(From: Warner Brothers' THE FRISCO KID)

CHARLES H. GRAY as PICO McGUIRE
TONY YOUNG as CORD, THE GUNSLINGER
(From: CBS's Western Series (1961)
GUNSLINGER)

The wind had increased its tempo, blowing hard at his back, bowing him still further over the saddle as he strove to pull his poncho higher on his neck until it kept the driving rain from penetrating his flimsy protection. His stetson collected the rain along the brim, then spilled it like a small waterfall, blinding him. He kept his eyes to the road that materialized out of the wet foggiess of the night between the flickering ears of his mount. It was not a fit night to be out, the storm having caught him miles from the small Mexican pueblo he'd picked for his next stop. But he was across the border and the heavy rains would erase his tracks, throwing the following posse into confusion and frustration, which would turn them back. He was safe.

"Got to be a better way of earnin' a livin'..." he mumbled to himself, watching the chestnut's ears flick back to catch his words. "Damn posse's getting too good with their rifles. 'Nother inch, we'd have parted company this time, Hoss." Thoughtfully, he plucked at the bullet hole in the poncho which had gone through the material without touching the flesh beneath; it had been a close thing. He stiffened, his hand tightening on the reins; he squinted into the heavy darkness ahead. A light. He touched heels to the gelding, moving the animal into a stumbling trot. It had to be Santa Rosa; warm, dry rooms, a shot of strong tequila and a friendly senorita would soon put right his world, the thoughts already warming his chilled body with anticipation. It was those thoughts, he would later tell himself, that had made him careless. The night Tommy Lillard rode into Santa Rosa...

The pueblo was quiet, boarded up tight against the natural elements of the rainy night; too quiet. The adobe buildings, dark with the wetness of the storms, incongruous with their usual dry ochre cheerfulness. Horses stood before the rails, their heads bowed, their tails to the wind, as they waited, hipshot, for unseen riders. Too many horses. Rough, gaunt, leggy animals, mounts accustomed to long hours of hard riding, all saddled with heavy Mexican gear, the wide horns draped with bandoleras, rifles filling each scabbard on each saddle.

Drawing rein, Tommy Lillard sat the weary chestnut in uneasy indecision, already picking out dark shadows against the adobe walls of many of the darkened buildings about him. Shadows of men in sombreros, faces hidden by the wide brims, lighted cigarettes, their flames sheltered from prying eyes by knowledgeable hands, sending light tracings of smoke curling lazily into the night. Too many men, quiet, watchful, heavily armed...Comancheros!

Lillard touched a nervous heel to the gelding, his left hand tight on the rein, his right close to the butt of the handgun in the waistband of his trousers, out of sight. He cursed himself sharply, then put it aside. It was too late to turn around and ride out, his horse too weary to attempt a run for it. He had ridden into a treed town and his chances of riding out--alive--would depend on his skill of laying low and staying out of trouble. The first he was damned capable at--the second, well, there was always a first time for everything.

He loosened his hold on the gelding's mouth, and the animal stepped out again, moving slowly down the muddy street; the darkness closing in about them, hiding them except for the times they were silhouetted against lighted doorways of abnormally quiet cantinas. The Texan felt the many eyes that watched his progress; consciously, he kept his hands to his reins and well away from the open holster on his hip. A sudden move, in the wrong direction, and he would die.

Reaching the corner approaching the pueblo's small plaza, Lillard grew more restless. So many men...horses...cantinas opened to business, but homes and businesses closed, their windows and doors barred and darkened, the tension electrifying in its very silence. A town waiting to die.

The rain had slackened to a misty drizzle as he crossed the plaza and reined into the open doorway of the town's only livery. Riding past the double doors, he quickly stepped from the chestnut and loosened his cinches.

"Senor?"

"Buenos noches..." He threw the back cinch and pulled the latigo, dragging the heavy Texas rigging from the tired gelding's back, the warm, wet, matted hair under the saddle blanket steaming as it was exposed to the warmth and dryness of the stable. "Se habla Inglés?"

"Sí, Patron. Manuel Rodriguez at your service."

"Give 'im a good rub-down, a heavy measure of oats...if you have 'em."

"Sí...and barley."

"Oats are fine. And fill his manger with all the prairie hay you can spare. We've come a far piece and he deserves a good feed."

The hostler reached for the gelding's bridle, motioning Lillard to one side where wooden racks had been mounted to hold saddle and gear, before he led the chestnut into an empty stall and tied it.

Racking his saddle, Tommy spread the wet blanket, hair side up, across the seat to dry in the warmth of the big barn. He slipped the poncho off and tied it in place behind the cantle, then moved back to check his horse again. The old man was briskly rubbing the animal's wet hide with double, twisted, handfuls of clean, dry straw, drying the slick coat while the chestnut contentedly munched on the full-grained feed which covered the bottom of his trough. The Texan nodded his satisfaction, tossing a silver cartwheel to the hostler in payment.

"Gracias, Senor, su caballo will be well taken care of. I will see to it personally."

"De nada y gracias, amigo." Lillard responded in kind, looking again at the darkness beyond the barn doors. "Where's a feller to get a good dry bed and a nosebag for himself in Santa Rosa?"

The old man paused in his rubbing of the gelding, his eyes hooded with uneasiness. "Senora Martinez runs a boarding house, but I think, Senor, she will not be welcoming visitors tonight. The cantina across the plaza rents rooms and some food with liquid refreshments. Tonight perhaps the best that can be done."

"Seems to be a lot of...strangers in town tonight. Caballeros from local ranchos?"

"No, Senor. There are few ranchos around Santa Rosa. Most of our people work the mines north of here for the combine." He avoided Lillard's searching gaze, working hard at the gelding's glistening hide.

"Who are they, amigo?"

"Por favor, Senor, do not ask. They are demons...diablos, quiet men who talk with their pistols. Mestizos, banditos...killers, Senor, who kill for pleasure...Mucho malo."

"Commancheros," Lillard finished.

"Los diablos," the old man repeated, crossing himself hurriedly, glancing in open fear at the open doors of the livery. "It would be best, Amigo, if you rode out...now. Your horse if rested...fed...he will be good for several hours travel..."

The Texan's jawline tightened, his hazel eyes hard with anger. "Perhaps, Amigo, perhaps, but not me. I'm tired. Too damn many hours in that saddle already...since way before light, tryin' to stay ahead of..." he paused, drawing a deep breath, leaving his sentence unfinished. "Let's just say I've done all the runnin' I care to for one day. Any names to these breeds who've treed your town?"

"Indio Sanchez, Senor. Ah..." he nodded, reading recognition in Lillard's eyes. "You have heard of 'im. Bueno. Then you will take my suggestion, and ride out. He is a crazed one, Hombre. A devil with a gun. And, the men who follow him, are of the very worse sort. Already, two men have died since they

rode in because they did not move out of his way quick enough. Our Padre prays over the children and old ones in our church...the young women stay inside, out of sight. For the moment, it is quiet. They wait."

"For what?" Interest pulled Tommy closer to the old man. "What are they waitin' for, important enough to keep them off your women?"

"Senor?!"

"Don't mess with me, ol' man. I KNOW commancheros. They eat towns like this one for breakfast. They ride in, kill anyone who stands in their way, take all the supplies they can carry and any women they find comely as prisoners to sell to those dealin' in human flesh. They're not raidin'. They're not whorin'...and it's too quiet, so they're not drinkin'. Sanchez has them on a tight rein. Why?"

"I cannot say, Patron. I do not know. They allowed you to ride in unharmed...but, I do not think, they will allow you to leave...the same way."

"Yeah," Tommy mumbled under his breath in mounting puzzlement. "What the hell are they waitin' for?" He glanced again at the open doors, the rain had stopped, the overhang dripping with the run-off, making a steady pit-pat in the quiet of the barn. "It's too damn quiet." He turned back to the hostler. "How long have they been here?"

"They rode in ahead of the storm...late afternoon."

"Rode in fast? Shooting? Killing?"

"No, Senor. They rode in slow, quiet. Only two shots were fired when two of our men tried to deny them entry to the pueblo...fearing for their women...their families." He nodded towards the shadows of hipshot horses across the street before the cantina. "Los caballos were tied and left saddled. The men come...go...from the cantina, but none are drunk. They stand about, their hands close to their guns, their eyes filled with the anger of men unaccustomed to waiting, but they wait. They wait."

"This don't make no kind of sense," Lillard mumbled.

"Mestizos...banditos, Senor, do not have to make sense."

"You got that right," Tommy agreed. "Still..." He looked again at the silent figures in the doorway of the cantina. "There's got to be a reason. Even Sanchez can't hold men like that without a damned good reason. They're animals with all their creature comforts here for the takin'...and they wait."

"Perhaps they wait for the rain to stop. Perhaps they will ride out with the dawn."

Lillard grunted. "Sure. You hold to that pipe-dream, ol' man. Maybe you'll live long enough to laugh at it. Commancheros don't ride into a pueblo like this just to turn around and ride back out! Something's in the air, important enough to hold 'em on a tight rein and quiet. Something damned important."

Lillard ran a careful, thoughtful hand over the chestnut's glistening back now dry from the vigorous rubdown, watching as the animal munched on large

mouthfuls of the golden hay. "If Commancheros aren't dealin' in liquor or women...they deal in..." His eyes narrowed with a sudden thought. "Guns... gold.."

"Senor?"

"Nothin, Ol' Man, just thinkin' out loud." Tommy rubbed at the old scar on the point of his chin. He sighed. "Just thinkin', if they aren't out there fightin' over what this pueblo has, then they're waitin' to get their hands on something you don't have but are gonna get soon. It just might be to my advantage to find out...what."

Tommy Lillard left the barn in thoughtful contemplation, his curiosity and a touch of foolhardiness warring with a natural cautiousness that continued to warn him against any sudden action that might draw him into a danger that would allow no way out. Still, his mind continued to mull over the possibilities. Santa Rosa was a mining town. Mining meant gold. And the raw ore had to be transported out of the mines, under heavily-armed guards, in heavy ore wagons. It could be taken with the number and viciousness of the Commancheros, but escape with it could be neither quick or without heavy cost to those taking it. He shook his head. If it were the raw gold they were attracted to, this squatting in Santa Rosa in full sight made no more sense than did anything else he could think of.

He stopped in the darkness of the livery and rolled a smoke; putting his making away, he glanced about cautiously before striking a match, sheltering the flame, before touching it to his smoke. Shaking out the match, he kept his cupped hand over the burning tip. Maybe he was being watched, maybe not, but he wanted time; time to think, time to plan his moves, before he ventured any further into the unknown. The hostler was right, he had been allowed to ride in, he wasn't going to press his luck by trying to ride out until he knew a little more about the situation he had suddenly found himself a part of. It was just too damned unnaturally quiet. He could almost smell the rank odor of fear and death that hung over the small Mexican pueblo.

He drew another lungful of smoke, his weary mind worrying over his slim facts. Santa Rosa was the closest town to the American border. The very reason he had ridden in. In Mexico, for a day's ride in any direction, there was nothing but a scattering of small sheep stations attempting to eke out a living on meager graze.

The American side. Some of the wildest country he'd ever ridden through. Hundreds of square miles of desert, little water and lots of Apaches. A few big ranches, with enough hands to live in a sort of harmony with the natives, but very, very few settlers.

And an Army post. He paused, the cigarette half-way to his lips. An Army post. How close? He wasn't sure of its exact location. He had stayed close to the rough foothills and hard ground for the better part of two days, attempting to discourage pursuit. The post would have been east of his southerly course, likely on the flats, somewhere north of the Chiricahua Mountains and between the scattered settlements and the Apache threat to the south. He shrugged. The Apaches were a threat in Mexico as well as the American-held territory, the Commancheros their unloved allies. As long as there was war, the Commancheros would feed the flames.



He crushed the smoke under his boot heel, grinding it into the mud, his hazel eyes hard with thought, which he shook from a mind too weary to concentrate longer on the meager facts he possessed. Comancheros were unpredictable. They lived and breathed death and violence. They were here and they were waiting. He shrugged. He didn't like it, but there was also nothing he, alone, could be expected to do about it, except keep low and stay alive.

Pulling away from the livery, he cautiously angled his steps towards the boarding house the hostler had mentioned. He would likely be turned away, but he would prefer it to the cantina and its silent, deadly clientele. He would lay low; eat, rest, keep both eyes and ears open until the Comancheros rode out. He would then ride out in the opposite direction, until he could safely work his way back into the States.

He reached the end of the plaza, paused, then crossed the darkened street. He frowned, stopping. His right hand crept to his belted gun at his hip. Had he seen movement in front of one of the darkened buildings across from him? He waited, his hand hard on the butt of his Colt, his eyes never leaving the alleyway beside the building. As he grew accustomed to the darkness, he picked out the figure of a man seated outside the closed door, under the covered veranda, his chair rocked back onto two legs, the huge sombrero pulled low over his face.

There! Another movement pulled Lillard straight with anticipated action. The door to the darkened building, behind the seated figure, had opened. Silently. Halfway. Enough to admit a man's body. He strained his senses. Someone was inside that doorway; someone who didn't want the seated man to see him. A dark shape emerged from the darkness. No, Tommy corrected himself, it was a darker shape against the darkness; a specter of silence with a drawn Colt in his fist, which edged towards the unsuspecting man.

Tommy Lillard swore under his breath, feeling the sweat of fear moisten the palm of his gun hand. He didn't want to buy into the game. But, damn, how could he stand by and allow someone to be dry gulched?! It wasn't his game. The only cards he could expect to draw were jokers.

The specter moved another step forward, the Colt fully cocked. Comanchero, or not, the Texan reasoned, he couldn't allow the man to be shot in the back. If he thumbed off a warning shot, he would likely draw return fire from the specter and possibly from the man he wished to warn as well. He pulled back into the deeper shadows of the nearest building, the words already forming on his lips.

"Espalde usted! Cuidado!" He was moving, even as he yelled, disappearing into the darkness, yet aware of the drama across the way. The seated man reacted with the agility of a painter*, throwing himself from the chair, twisting in mid-air, a drawn knife flashing in his fist as he met the specter. The knife arched downward towards the moving body, as the taller figure tried to twist away from the blade, the Colt in his fist attempting to ward off the attack. Yet he made no move to pull the trigger. The knife descended, under the Colt, disappearing, merging with the battling shapes of the two men. In the faint illumination of a cantina several doors down, Lillard saw the specter stumble, right himself, then bring the Colt down savagely. The Comanchero crumbled at the specter's feet, who made no move to finish the attack, but stood quiet, his tall, lean frame braced against the adobe, the Colt cocked and ready, as he glanced about the quiet streets.

*American Mountain Lion

Tommy pressed himself still harder against the adobe, not wishing to draw fire from the ready Colt. He had clubbed down the Commanchero, but had made no move to finish him. If he'd not been stalking the bandit with an intent to kill, why had he been sneaking out of the darkness at his back? Until he knew more, the Texan held his own council.

The tall spector, keeping to the heavy darkness of the building, moved slowly, cautiously into the protection of the alley alongside the adobe. His movements labored, jerky, his tall frame bowed. The knife had found its mark, Lillard reasoned grimly. The spector was soon out of sight.

Tommy pulled away from his own protected darkness, cautiously crossing to the building where the still man lay, his hand now filled with the security of his belted Colt, his eyes searching the silence about him. The streets remained quiet. There had been something...he could not put a finger to... something familiar in the spector's movements. That something worried him. A tall man. Lean. A Stetson...not sombrero. Not Mexican? Not Commanchero? American?

Reaching the adobe, he knelt and turned the man over, the huge sombrero falling away from the half-breed's swarthy features. Mexican. Indio. Either or both, he could not be sure, but Commanchero. He was out cold, his breathing regular, even. He would take a long nap, but awaken with a nasty headache and a bigger anger. Lillard had no intention of being there when he did.

Rising, the Texan moved again into the protection of the adobe, to the open doorway, a dark abnormality on the ochre clay catching his eye. He touched fingers to it. Wet. Blood. The Commanchero's knife had, indeed, found its mark and it had sunk deep from the amount smeared on the clay to draw his attention in the darkness. Grimly, Lillard reached a hand to the street and scooped up a handful of mud, smearing it over the tell-tale marking. Why, he couldn't say; perhaps, he reasoned, because he was beginning to suspect he'd backed the wrong hand in the game.

He moved to the alley where the stumbling spector had vanished, cautiously waiting, listening to the darkness beyond, before he followed. The man was hurt, but he'd held the Colt with the easiness of long association; he had no desire to come upon him suddenly or without ample warning.

"Trouble. I can't stay out of trouble," he mumbled; thumbing the hammer of the Colt to full cock, he moved into the alleyway, pressing himself firmly against the cold adobe. He should just turn and walk away. He should, but he knew he couldn't. He had bought into a game without looking at his hand. He'd made a fool's play and someone had been hurt by his move. He would play it out.

The alley was total darkness and he was forced to move slowly, cautiously; his heart, pounding against his ribs, the only sound about him. At anytime, he could walk into the spector's Colt or stumble over his lifeless body; it kept him moving forward. He reached the back of the building; nothing. He paused again, unwilling to leave the building's protecting darkness, for the openness of the ground beyond. Above him, a thin, thread of a moon peaked from behind the heavy clouds of the moving storm, illuminating the back of the buildings and several corrals situated there. They were empty. No. He hesitated. On the far side of one, he'd seen the shape of a horse...then another one...just before the moon once again disappeared behind its clouded cover.

He ran swiftly, silently, to the corral, pressing himself against the thick posts, listening to the silence about him. Then, with his finger lightly on the trigger of the cocked Colt, he moved along the fence towards the waiting animals. Reaching the far side of the enclosure, he stopped.

There, in the protection of a small lean-to that served as a barn, stood two horses, ground-tied, saddled and waiting. A short-coupled sorrel gelding and a rangy blood-bay. The sorrel's rigging was not Mexican. He had been right. Whoever, whatever, the spectator was, he was gringo. His attention fell on the blood bay, a big solidly-built animal and memory bit hard and deep. He knew the horse, recognized the heavy, ornate Mexican rigging on it, heavily inlaid with silver conchos...the thongs missing from one side. "Damned! It can't be. I'm seein' things. Shee-it! There's a lot of men in the Southwest who carry Colts and know how to use them. Jesus...don't let it be that one I just got stabbed!"

"Arriba las manos. Pronto!"

Tommy Lillard stiffened, his mind racing as he evaluated his situation. It wasn't good. The voice, soft, harsh, heavy with threatened violence, came from behind him. Close. Too close, even in the night's darkness, to miss.

"Ahora, Gringo!"

The Texan released the hammer on his Colt and allowed the weapon to drop from his hand, hearing the dull thump as it hit the ground at his feet. Slowly, carefully, he raised his hands until they were shoulder high. "Now what, Amigo?" he whispered.

"Se habla Espanol?"

"If I have to. Same as you speak American, McGuire."

There was a moment of silence. Tommy Lillard stood quiet, hoping he was not wrong; knowing, if he were right, things could only get worse.

"What are you doing here, Lillard?" The voice was still soft and, with the switch to another language, the slight brogue behind the words was more noticeable.

"I could ask you the same thing," he fenced carefully.

"I don't think I should tell you, my friend." The voice answered easily, but hooded with suspicion, distrust.

"I don't think I want to know," the Texan replied, careful to keep his hands well away from the holstered Colt still at his hip. He knew the man behind him; knew who he was and what he could do with the gun that would be in his hand. He wanted no misunderstandings between them. "Can I turn around?"

Silence followed his request, then movement touched the edges of his vision and a tall figure moved to his side, a Colt, as he'd suspected, pointed steadily at his belt buckle.

"You can lower your hands, but keep them away from your Colt and where I can see them. Move closer to the horses, out of the light, while we talk."



Tommy nodded, moving back until his shadow merged with those of the horses, the tall, Mexican-Irish joining him, cautiously holstering the Colt.

Pico McGuire looked much as he had the last time they'd met, except for the lines of worry etched around his mouth and the drawn weariness in the blue-gray eyes that stood out boldly against his dark, sunbrowned features, denying the Mexican blood that ran in his veins mixed with the Irish, giving a Latin charm to a man equally at home with a gun in his hand or a young senorita in his arms.

"Wasn't expecting you, Lillard, nor, I suspect, you...me. Why are you here?"

"I saw someone slipping out this way. I followed."

"Porqué?"

Lillard shifted uneasily, uncomfortable with the questions put to him. "Thought I recognized someone..."

"Rapido?"

"Yeah. Now, I'm not sure. He's not here." The Texan hesitated, studying the handsome features of the man before him, the blue-gray eyes hooded, unreadable. "Was he supposed to be?"

"If all went well," McGuire hedged.

"Your horses are saddled, cinches drawn and ready for travel," Lillard observed casually. "You ridin' out?"

"Those were our plans. I'm wonderin', Amigo, what you may have done to change them."

"Look, McGuire," Tommy drawled, "I don't know what you and that hard-eyed, fast-shootin' friend of yours are up to--and I don't want to know," he hastened to add. "It's none of my damn business and I'd like to keep it that way. Trouble follows you two like the black plague."

McGuire chuckled softly, amusement putting a mischievous sparkle to his eyes. "You can say that, mi amigo, with a straight face when we court the same jester?" He sobered, looking about the quiet corral and the bordering adobes, then back at the uneasy Texan, obviously looking for someone Tommy Lillard now suspected would not be coming. "You know something. What?"

Lillard shifted uncomfortably under the hard scrutiny of the older man. "Ah, well..." He looked up, meeting McGuire's questioning gaze. "I was across the street, coming from the livery, when I saw someone slipping out of one of the adobes..." he nodded towards the darkened building behind them, "that one, with a drawn gun. Another man was seated on the porch. There was a scuffle and the seated man went down. Quiet. The other slipped into the alley and came this way. There was something in the way he moved...carried himself...I thought I knew him so...I followed him."

"Go on."

Tommy drew a deep breath. "The man who went down had a blade...and used it."

The lines around McGuire's mouth deepened. "Maldito sea! You are sure of this? Rapido was hurt? Badly?"

Tommy shrugged. "There was blood...a lot of it."

"He wouldn't come here if..." The Mexican-Irish looked hard at the Texan, "if he thought he were being followed." He swore again, glancing back at the darkened adobe. "And, if he's found with that knife wound..."

As if on a prearranged cue, a shout went up from the darkness, in the direction Lillard had pointed. The two men moved closer to the horses, exchanging worried glances, drawing their Colts as they fell silent, listening as the shouts continued, increasing in volume, anger.

"Quickly," McGuire hissed, "mount up, we've got to get the horses away from here."

The Texan swung aboard the sorrel, reining the big gelding behind the already moving bay, giving the animal its head, knowing it would stay next to the larger, eager to put distance quickly between themselves and the downed Comanchero.

Weaving in and out of several alleyways, they rode slowly, quietly, among the darkened buildings of the small pueblo until they drew up next to an abandoned adobe, fallen to ruin, its roof caved in, the porch supported at only one end by a rotted timber. McGuire swung from his saddle and led the bay into the small structure. Lillard hesitated only a moment before following the taller man's lead.

Inside, there was just room and clearance to hide the two horses. They dropped the reins, and moved to the empty doorway, facing the open streets of the pueblo. Men were on the move; running, guns drawn, towards the building where Lillard had left the downed man. They waited, neither speaking until the activity slowed and silence greeted their straining senses.

"They may not know he was hit," Lillard offered hopefully.

"Qué?"

"I smeared mud over the wall where Cord must have leaned after the attack. In the dark, it could go unnoticed."

McGuire grunted his disbelief. "You ever use a knife, Lillard?"

"What the hell has that to do with anything!"

"I have," McGuire remarked harshly. "A man who uses a blade knows when it finds its mark. If Jesus is not dead...he will know."

"He's not dead." McGuire made no comment, but his brow raised in question. "Cord cold-cocked him, but he'll be awake and nasty by now."

"Then they know Rapido's hurt. They'll suspect trouble...perhaps betrayal. The first thing they'll do is..." he voice trailed off as horsemen raced down the streets of Santa Rosa, their rifles flashing in the lights of passing bars and cantinas, quiet, with deadly purpose in their movements.

"...seal off the town."

"Si," the Mexican-Irish agreed grimly. "Rapido was where he didn't belong. They can't ignore that...or the attack. If he's found wounded, he's a dead man."

"And, if they don't find him, McGuire, they'll turn this damned town into a blood bath!" His voice hardened, hazel eyes meeting and holding to the blue ones of the older man. McGuire moved away from the wall, only to be stopped by an urgent hand to his arm. "Wait!" Tommy hissed, feeling the heavy-corded muscles tighten under his rough grip. "Wait, goddamit!"

McGuire shook loose of the Texan's grasp, his eyes hard, expressionless, his mouth drawn tight under the small, neatly trimmed mustache, in thin-edged anger. "Stay out of this, Lillard. It doesn't concern you. Ride out while you still can."

Tempted, silently contemplating his chances, Tommy Lillard glanced again about the streets of the small Mexican pueblo. "Yeah," he mumbled, "One man, alone, might still be able to make it."

"Then go!" McGuire snapped. "Quickly! I've got to find Rapido." He moved again from the protection of the adobe, only to be stopped once more.

"You'll lead them right to him! Goddamit, they're gonna be looking for a wounded man, but any man-jack who isn't one of them is sure likely to stop lead before questions!"

"Soy un amigo de ellos," McGuire snapped.

"Huh?!"

"I am one of them! Comprende?" A swift movement in the darkness and he was gone.

Tommy Lillard stood stunned in the silence of the Mexican's declaration. Alone, his palms wet with a building fear of what he'd stepped into, he glanced quickly about the streets now alive with quiet, determined, deadly men who continued to search the buildings and alleys around the area of the attack. There was no sign of let-up, no sign of the usual shooting, killing, ruthless mayhem that should have erupted with the silent attack against one of their own. The silent, determination of their cold purpose worried him more than the possibility of his discovery.

He glanced again at the two horses standing ground-tied behind him in the old adobe, before slipping outside and into the shadows, moving back towards the livery where he'd left his own mount. Where he was going, he wasn't sure, but he wanted his horse saddled and ready. If the chance presented itself, he was leaving and fast. The town, the Comancheros, the surfacing of two men he knew to be trouble, all spelled 'death' on a short fuse, already lit and burning--when it exploded, he didn't want to be anywhere nearby.

It took him several moments to retrace his steps, stopping several times, once throwing himself to the ground while searching, silent shadows probed the darkness around the adobe buildings near him. He kept his Colt drawn, cocked,

The lines around McGuire's mouth deepened. "Maldito sea! You are sure of this? Rapido was hurt? Badly?"

Tommy shrugged. "There was blood...a lot of it."

"He wouldn't come here if..." The Mexican-Irish looked hard at the Texan, "if he thought he were being followed." He swore again, glancing back at the darkened adobe. "And, if he's found with that knife wound..."

As if on a prearranged cue, a shout went up from the darkness, in the direction Lillard had pointed. The two men moved closer to the horses, exchanging worried glances, drawing their Colts as they fell silent, listening as the shouts continued, increasing in volume, anger.

"Quickly," McGuire hissed, "mount up, we've got to get the horses away from here."

The Texan swung aboard the sorrel, reining the big gelding behind the already moving bay, giving the animal its head, knowing it would stay next to the larger, eager to put distance quickly between themselves and the downed Comanchero.

Weaving in and out of several alleyways, they rode slowly, quietly, among the darkened buildings of the small pueblo until they drew up next to an abandoned adobe, fallen to ruin, its roof caved in, the porch supported at only one end by a rotted timber. McGuire swung from his saddle and led the bay into the small structure. Lillard hesitated only a moment before following the taller man's lead.

Inside, there was just room and clearance to hide the two horses. They dropped the reins, and moved to the empty doorway, facing the open streets of the pueblo. Men were on the move; running, guns drawn, towards the building where Lillard had left the downed man. They waited, neither speaking until the activity slowed and silence greeted their straining senses.

"They may not know he was hit," Lillard offered hopefully.

"Que?"

"I smeared mud over the wall where Cord must have leaned after the attack. In the dark, it could go unnoticed."

McGuire grunted his disbelief. "You ever use a knife, Lillard?"

"What the hell has that to do with anything!"

"I have," McGuire remarked harshly. "A man who uses a blade knows when it finds its mark. If Jesus is not dead...he will know."

"He's not dead." McGuire made no comment, but his brow raised in question. "Cord cold-cocked him, but he'll be awake and nasty by now."

"Then they know Rapido's hurt. They'll suspect trouble...perhaps betrayal. The first thing they'll do is..." he voice trailed off as horsemen raced down the streets of Santa Rosa, their rifles flashing in the lights of passing bars and cantinas, quiet, with deadly purpose in their movements.

"Damned right!" He tied his bedroll and saddle bags tightly into place. "No damned way I could have known it was him. I did what any man..." his voice trailed off. "No...I didn't. A man doesn't buy into a hand without seeing his hold-card. Too damned much exposure to the Rabbi...likely get myself killed playing good Samaritan one of these days...maybe this time."

In the darkness of the stall, something touched the back of his hand; he started, his right already reaching for his holstered gun, stopping halfway to the weapon as he slowly relaxed. Another drop of moisture hit him, and he looked up. "Damned barn leaks." He glanced at his hand resting on the gelding's neck watching as still another drop hit him. He watched as another hit the seat of his saddle. Above him would be the loft; he looked overhead again. If the roof were leaking, it was unlikely it would do so this steadily after the rain had stopped.

He reached into his pocket, secured a match and struck it, shielding the flame with his hand as he studied the spots of moisture on the saddle and his hand, touching gentle fingers to one of them; it was blood. He quickly shook out the match, glancing again at the loft above him.

"Cord." The name formed on his lips as he backed slowly out of the stall, looking about for the ladder that would take him to the loft overhead. He crossed to the back of the barn, to the ladder, and started up it slowly. He paused after each step, listening to the noises of the barn, his progress muffled but possibly heard by the man he now suspected to be above him. The loft opening loomed above him; empty, dark, vacant, it did nothing to lull his fears. Somewhere above him, could be a cocked .44 Colt revolver in the hand of a wounded man who knew how to use it, and would be prepared to do so, if threatened. He moved on up, hesitating a moment at the top of the ladder.

"Cord..." He whispered the name but only darkness and silence greeted his inquiry. He climbed into the loft, his hand moving away from his belt gun as he squinted, attempting to make out any movement. He saw nothing. Cautiously, he moved to the area of the loft above his horse's stall. He found the place... empty. Again he struck a match and knelt to check out the floorboards. They were stained with a dark liquid, wet to the touch.

Getting to his feet, the Texan hurriedly checked out the rest of the loft. The man who'd been there was gone, going as quietly as he had come.

"Damn." Lillard returned to the area where the wounded man had lain above him only moments before. He touched again the stained floorboards. "He's losing a hell of a lot of blood. He can't go on without help. If McGuire doesn't find him soon..." He allowed his words to trail off, his thoughts heavy with concern for the man he knew to be wounded. "On his feet, moving, he may stay clear of them, for a while...but not losing blood like this."

Back on the floor of the barn, he glanced again at his saddled horse. "Stay low and wait for a chance to ride out. That's what I'm going to do. McGuire doesn't want me in this and I sure in hell don't want in it."

Voices, footsteps, coming toward the barn, moved Lillard back into the stall and out of sight. Crouching against the boards and hidden by the dark bulk of his horse, Colt drawn, silent, in his grip, hammer thumbed back to full cock, Tommy watched the big doors swing open to allow two men entry; one in Army blue

leading a U.S. Army branded horse, the other, Indio Sanchez, the Commanchero leader. The Texan stiffened, his fist tightening on the butt of his Colt as he suspected the danger of his witnessing the meeting between these two men.

The Army man dismounted, ground-tying the gelding as he looked nervously about the empty barn. "Glad to see you got in with the storm and all. I wasn't sure you'd make it."

"Si, we are here. Everything is set? The arranged time? The place?"

"Yes, just as we agreed. They'll be at the river just short of dawn. Having come through the pass safely, pushing all night, they'll be only hours out of Fort Scott, confident, guard down. They'll be thinking of food, bed... they won't expect trouble."

"Bueno. Gokhlayeh?"

"He'll be at rendezvous time tomorrow. He'll have the gold; you have the guns, ammo..."

Sanchez nodded his satisfaction.

The Army man glanced out the double doors at the activity which still filled the streets with silently searching men. "What's going on?"

"De nada, nothing...that will not be settled before we leave."

Puzzlement touched the cavalryman's features, but wisdom kept him silent to a situation obviously not to be too closely questioned. He stiffened, moving away from his horse, to stand in the darkened doorway, his attention drawn across the way to the lighted saloon and a man who had stepped onto the veranda, pausing in the illumination behind him to light a smoke. As the match flared, his features were exposed to those watching.

"That man. On the porch of the cantina. Who is he?"

Sanchez moved up along side the Cavalryman. "Es Rico Mantoya, one of my men, porque?"

"Uh, uh. That's Pico McGuire. I'd know that hombre anywhere."

"Who is this...this...McGuire?"

"Drifter..." The cavalryman shrugged. "Hell of a man with his fists..."

"And his gun," Sanchez finished. "He is mucho hombre."

"He also scouts for Wingate at Fort Scott." The man in blue turned back to the surprised Commanchero. "Didn't know that, did you, Sanchez? I don't like it. His being here. Now."

"He is not Army."

"Not now," the Army man denied, "but he was a couple of years back. How well do you know him?"



"His features were exposed to those watching."

Sanchez was silent for several moments before answering. "He is of my mother's people. He knows the Commanchero ways...the Apache. I have known those who have known him, but no one gets close to him except one man. Gringo. El Pistolero Grande. Him, with the deadly eyes, I do not trust."

"Cord!" The name touched the man's lips with reverence and fear. "The Gunslinger. He's here? With McGuire?"

"Si. You know of the deadly one also?"

"Yeah, he hangs around the post a lot with McGuire. I don't like this, Sanchez."

Silence followed the Army man's uneasy words.

"It is possible...these two men...could be associated with...the Army?"

"I don't know. I don't think so, not their kind. But I don't like the coincidence. It's too damned pat. I'm not saying either of them are above making a little money on the side, but on their own or together, perhaps, not a part of someone else's action. And why the other name? It smells, Sanchez... I don't like it."

Indio Sanchez shook his head thoughtfully, and Lillard waited knowing the Commanchero had to be thinking of the wounded man they sought. They could see McGuire across the street, obviously uninjured. But suspicion had been focused on him, would not that same suspicion now be focusing on Cord?

"Where's the Gunslinger now?"

"I do not know, Senor, but I think I will find out...before we leave. Questions will be asked of Mantoya and his gringo amigo; if I do not like the answers, they will stay when we leave...but they will tell no secrets."

The cavalryman grunted his agreement. "That's your business, Sanchez. Now, if you have the money, I'll get out of here."

"Not now, Amigo," Indio mumbled, rubbing at his stubbled chin.

"That was our agreement, Sanchez. Everything's set. You'll have those guns by first light. I've done my part. Now do yours."

"Si, you will have your money, Miloe, but I think, perhaps, it will be better to give it to you after we have the guns and are once again on this side of the border. There are too many surprises developing in this deal."

"There could have been more, Amigo," the man called Miloe pointed out sarcastically. "If I hadn't recognized McGuire, you might have been in more trouble than you know by morning. You took them on, they're your problem, not mine. You mend your own fences. But I don't leave, and that detail doesn't make that turn towards the river, until I have my money."

The Commanchero's dark eyes sparkled with anger, his hand moving towards his belted revolver, but Miloe stood his ground. "Don't be stupid, Sanchez. You need those guns and the gold Gokhlayeh will pay you for them. No guns and his band of Apaches will have your Commancheros for breakfast. He hates white-eyes...but he hates Mexicans more. You cross him and you'll likely find

yourself blinded and staked out over some ant hill with his squaws lightin' fires in very sensitive places..."

"You will have your money before dawn."

Miloe shrugged. "As you say, Sanchez. I won't ask any more questions. Just so we understand each other. I have to leave by first light to get to the detail and turn them towards the river. I have the money, I turn the detail. If I don't have the money, or leave too late to meet them, you'll have some explaining to do to Gokhlayeh...and he's not a listening man." Smiling, the military man handed the reins of his horse to the Commanchero leader and walked from the barn.

Sanchez stood motionless for several moments then threw the reins to the ground, startling the bay who shied away, only to stop and start pulling hay from a bale in front of an empty stall. The Mexican turned on his heel and left the barn, deadly purpose to his stride as he headed across the street and cantina where McGuire had stood only moments before, unaware of the dark figure that had moved from the stall and slipped silently from the barn behind him.

Once outside, Tommy Lillard holstered his Colt and sprinted across the darkened street, hurrying into the shadows at the side of the cantina. McGuire. He had to get to the Mexican-Irish before Sanchez found him. If he were taken, questioned, likely under knife and fire, neither he nor Cord would leave the pueblo alive at dawn. It was also possible under the pain of the questioning, his own name might come up. He had no intentions of being drawn into the game.

* * *

Pico McGuire downed another drink, his mind racing, his thoughts heavy on the whereabouts of the gunman. He'd checked their rooms above the cantina; they were empty with no sign that the gunslinger had returned to them since he'd been hurt. He had not gone to the rooms, he'd not gone to the horses. If Lillard was right, Cord was hurt and badly; he would need help. But he wouldn't come near McGuire if he felt he would endanger him or blow his cover. What could Cord have found in Sanchez's quarters that could have raised the alarm it had? All they had to do was ride out, see that the Commancheros made the rendezvous at the river and the decoy they had set to snare them. They had stayed until the end, hoping to find out who was selling information on the Army supply movements to Sanchez and his band, intent on taking out the spy, if possible, without blowing the trap's plans.

It had been a risk, Cord going to Sanchez's quarters on that off chance of finding some clue to the spy's identify, but they had been running out of time. If he'd found what he sought, they were to have met at the horses with the idea of riding out ahead of the attachment. If not, they would have stayed until the trap sprung shut and hoped to be able to single out the spy when the plan to take the shipment fell through.

He shook his head. The search for Cord would intensify as time to leave drew closer. Whatever he'd stumbled into was important, damned important, to draw the silent search it had. If he had the information, the name, he should have gone to the horses. If he didn't have it, why the deadly attempt to find him? And where was Cord? Most puzzling of all, why had Tommy Lillard followed

Cord into the darkened alley? Knowing the situation, the Comancheros, the treed-town, the danger of being anywhere near trouble and the men who controlled the town, Tommy Lillard should have hurried off in the opposite direction when he'd witnessed the scuffle on the porch of the adobe.

Downing his drink, McGuire eased to the back of the bar and let himself out the back. A movement from the darkness, and he reached for his Colt.

"McGuire! Over here. Quick!"

Swearing under his breath, Pico McGuire moved towards the urgency in the Texan's voice as the man moved from the shadows to meet him.

"Lillard, I thought I told you..."

"Yeah, yeah, I know what the hell you told me. I wish to hell I'd listened. Or, not listened..." He grunted in irritated anger. "Come on, we've got to get some distance between us and this place before we talk."

"You're going to explain that."

"Not here. Come on." McGuire hesitated. "You'd rather have Sanchez and a couple of his indios ask some questions with knives at your throat and burning matches under your toenail?"

McGuire glanced once more at the back of the cantina, then hurried after the departing Texan, his Colt tight in his fist.

They reached the livery, and Lillard filled McGuire in on the conversation he'd overheard. Watching the Mexican-Irish closely, he waited. McGuire remained silent for several moments, his blue eyes reflecting his concern.

"Well?" the Texan pressed. "You're both in this up to your eyebrows, aren't you? For the money? The gold?" He watched the expressionless features of the older man. "Or the...Army?" Something touched McGuire's eyes, and Lillard nodded. "Thought so. Goddamit, man, do you have any idea what the hell the two of you are doing?! You know what these hellions will do to you if they even suspect the two of you work for the Army?!"

"You don't have to advertise it to the world!" McGuire snapped, forcing Lillard to lower his voice. "You said it, it's none of your business. Stay out of it."

"Stay out of it!" Tommy repeated heatedly. "With what I know?! If they get their hands on any one of the three of us, we're ALL dead! It don't matter if I'm in it or not. I know too damned much! They're lookin' for a wounded man, and believe me, Cord's name is high on the list of suspects. And your cover's blown, McGuire, puttin' you right up there, next to him, when the questions start, my friend. And, if either of you go under the knife, I have to expect my name to come up real quick."

An amused look touched the blue eyes of the Mexican-Irish. "You don't think much of Rapido's and my ability to keep secrets, do you, Amigo?"

"From this crowd?! With their art of persuasion? No, McGuire, I don't!"

"You saw the face of this Miloe...the Army spy?" McGuire inquired, changing the subject, watching as suspicion and puzzlement touched the Texan's expressive features.

"Yeah, sure. What's that got to do with anything?"

"You would recognize him again? If you saw him?"

"If I had to."

"To keep rifles, ammo, out of the hands of the Apaches?"

"Now, hold on, McGuire," Lillard stammered, "if you're thinkin' what I think you are...?"

"Ten years ago," McGuire explained, "Lillard, Jose Marie Carrasco, the Military Governor of Sonora, and Major John Cemoney of the U. S. Army, while working together surveying the American-Mexican boundaries, plotted and carried out one of the largest Apache massacres in Mexican history. They baited them in with bribes of peace, then killed one hundred and thirty of them, ninety women and children. Among the dead were the wife and children of the Apache subchief Gokhlayeh.* He and Mangos Coloradas escaped with promises of revenge." McGuire paused, his eyes hard. "Gokhlayeh was sent to recruit other Apaches; he did: Mangus Colorado of the Bedonkohe Apache, Whoe, or Juh, as you may know him, chief of the Nadni and, Cochise and the Chokonen. They faced over a thousand Mexican military, Lillard, and won. In the course of their victory, they tore hell out of Sonora, killing anyone who stood in their way. Among those killed...were my family."

He quickly held up a hand silencing the Texan's attempt to interrupt. "It was a long time ago. Now Gokhlayeh's put himself under Cochise and his Chiricahuas and there is, at least, some semblance of peace. Mangas Colorado's an old man, tired of war and tolerating a few mining outposts in his territory. Mexico and the U. S. are at peace, and Cochise is talking peace. But Gokhlayeh does not forget...or forgive. And he will not bow to the White Man's encroachment into the Apache territories.

"Now there is talk of a transcontinental stageline coming, its route crossing into Cochise's territory only miles short of his stronghold. If Gokhlayeh gets those guns and can fire up Cochise or some of his young braves...there will be war, bloodshed that might not end for years. It'll start here, in Mexico, for Gokhlayeh hates Mexicans above all others, but it'll be the American Army who'll have to stop him. And your peoples...and Cord's...will die."

McGuire watched Tommy closely. "The spy and Gokhlayeh is why Cord and I stayed. The Army has a shipment, as you know, coming within Sanchez's reach come daylight. It's a trap. If it's sprung, Sanchez's band will be captured or killed. But without the spy, another network could be set up in a matter of weeks, months, and we're right back to square one."

"Put the proper pressure on one of Sanchez's indios, or Sanchez himself, and you'll have the spy pointed out quick enough," Tommy fenced. "You don't need me."

*McGuire's tale is a true one. Gokhlayeh would become the last of the 'fighting' Apaches and bear the name of Geronimo given him by the Mexicans during this campaign.

"Comancheros die, Amigo, they do not talk," McGuire sighed. "Neither must we fall into Sanchez's hands...alive. This trap must work. Knowledge of it must not be leaked before they are within Wingate's reach. That's my job... and Cord's. You wanted out of this. I'll help you get clear, if you'll take the information you have to the Army."

"And you'll stay and find Cord. Get him out or get him killed, along with yourself," Lillard finished.

"Es mi amigo."

It was a simple statement of fact but the only argument Lillard would not question. He, too, had a friend, a friend he'd put his life on the line for more times than he cared to think about. Knowing, if necessary, he'd do so again and again. "Yeah," he gave in softly.

"I will tell you how to find Wingate. Over the river, bearing north, then east..."

"Forget it, McGuire," Lillard interrupted. "I couldn't get there in the dark, not knowing exactly where they're at...not before the raid."

"Doesn't matter. Before. After. As long as Wingate knows who the spy is."

"No," Lillard refused. "I'll describe the guy to you, as best I can, but that's it, McGuire. You took cards in this game, I'm sittin' out." He hesitated, fighting his conscience, choosing his next words carefully. "I want out of this, McGuire. It's a deathtrap and the two of you are getting 'hotter' by the minute. When I find a way, I'm riding out of here, but until then...well, I'll try to help you find Cord."

Puzzlement was naked in the Mexican-Irish's eyes. "Que? He's my friend, not yours. If you want to help us, for whatever reason, Lillard, get that information to the Army."

Lillard shrugged, avoiding the penetrating stare of the intense blue eyes of the older man. "I have my reasons, McGuire, why it has to be this way. Let's just leave it at that..."

A burst of gunfire stiffened both men, pulling them quickly to the barn doors, opening them cautiously to the night air. The wind grabbed at them attempting to pull them free as they stared into the dark night watching men rushing past, guns drawn, moving toward the north end of the pueblo.

"Rapido!"

"Maybe..." Tommy voiced doubtfully. "What's down there?"

McGuire shrugged. "Nada. Homes, businesses..."

"Why would Cord be there?" he questioned aloud. "In the only part of town not searched?"

"Away from our rooms, the horses..." McGuire finished softly. "He would not..." His jawline set with decision. "But it must be checked out...even the possibility..."

"Don't be a damned fool, McGuire. They could be shootin' at shadows! Or trying to draw one, or both, of you out!" McGuire made a move to leave the barn, only to be stopped by Lillard's hand to his gun arm. "Damn it, listen to me!" A hard look from the Mexican-Irish, and he dropped his hand. "Okay...shit...check it out. Go ahead! Walk right into their hands!" McGuire stepped again into the opening of the doors. "McGuire. If they have him...it's already too late to help."

"I'll meet you back here in fifteen...twenty minutes." McGuire edged into the darkness. "Stay...or ride out. Now. While you still can."

Tommy swore hotly under his breath as the Mexican-Irish slipped out of the barn and disappeared into the darkness. "And I credited him with the brains in this! Goddamit, that's it!"

He moved to his horse, backed the gelding from the stall, the barn's silence settling around him as he checked his cinch and led the animal towards the big double doors. Under the cover of the activity centering around the shots at the far end of the town, Tommy Lillard swung into his saddle and reined the horse into the alley, keeping to the darkest shadows as he moved slowly in the opposite direction. Tommy reasoned with a little luck, the activity would provide him with the time he needed to ride clear.

Moments later, he reined up near the adobe which hid the horses belonging to McGuire and the Gunslinger. He hesitated, then dismounted, glancing into the hut. It was empty.

Swiftly, he mounted, moving out into the edges of the street, glancing up and down the tie rails that bordered several of the busier establishments. Halfway down the street, he spotted the two horses, still saddled, but tied before the building where Cord had been hurt. Sanchez's own headquarters. Two shadows stood under the veranda's cover, guns drawn, within easy sight of the horses.

A shout went up as he spotted them, a flash erupting from one as a bullet fanned his cheek. Jerking the gelding's head around, Tommy set spurs to it, swinging around the edge of the adobe as another shot hit the sandstone, throwing debris into his face. He swung around another corner and the building sheltered him from other shots that followed his retreat.

He'd been seen, but in the darkness, likely had been mistaken for either McGuire or the Gunslinger. Reining in and out of several streets, Tommy pulled the gelding up, listening to the silence around him. Men rushed about, guns drawn, but unsure of the targets around them. A man on horseback would quickly draw fire. The Texan dismounted, tying his chestnut among several other animals at the corner of the next adobe. From there, he was steps from the center of town and, he realized, right back where he'd started from. He moved cautiously from the tie-rail and into the shadows.

Why had he stopped? If he'd ridden on by, likely he would have made it. He should have realized the possibility of the horses having been found with the first search, and the wisdom of moving them, waiting for someone to return. Now, he'd pulled activity back towards them, and he had no idea where McGuire was. He shrugged. There was nothing he could do about it now. At least he'd sprung the trap. On foot, the Mexican-Irish would have been easily taken...or

shot. They were still free and alive, but he'd killed any chances of their leaving town unseen.

"Someday...I'm going to learn to mind my own damned business...if I live so long." He chastised himself strongly, then put it away, turning his thoughts to the wounded man who needed help.

Activity had shifted to the opposite end of Santa Rosa; men milling about, talking, guns slowly disappearing into holsters, as they again spread out for another search. The trap had failed, but they were not giving up. Tommy glanced to the eastern horizon. It was still dark, but the first signs of coming dawn was not far away. No one could now reach the Army in time to warn them of the coming attack and Sanchez would be confident of his success, however angry he might be in his inability to lay his hands on the two men he suspected of betrayal. Chances of their survival would improve as time ran out for the Commanchero band. A sudden thought stiffened the Texan.

"Damn!" He glanced again at the barn he'd left moments before, his mind racing. Cord had been in the loft...hurt, he would have been moving slowly when he left...already, Lillard knew he was right. If he'd seen the Army spy, it was also possible Cord, leaving the barn, had seen him, too. He felt his flesh crawl at the foolhardiness of the game he was sure the wounded gunman was playing.

Calling himself--and the Gunslinger--several varieties of fool, the Texan turned away from his horse and what could be his last chance to ride away from the trouble he'd attempted to avoid that had thrown him into the company of two men he'd hoped never to see again. Fate? He shrugged. Fate, perhaps, had pulled them together that first time; but he couldn't deny it had been his own actions that had led to the circumstances reuniting them. Shrugging, he accepted the situation and started working his way back down the street.

The soldier would be riding out soon to meet and turn the detail towards the river, into the trap Sanchez would be waiting to spring. A trap to spring a trap. Tommy smiled. If he had to make a guess, he'd have bet it had been the Gunslinger's plan. Cord would have found perverted pleasure in watching Sanchez's Commancheros, high with the success of a sure victory, suddenly looking down the barrels of hidden Army artillery while he and McGuire closed the trap at their flanks. A dangerous scheme, to be sure, but one that suited the special talents of the two men. He quickened his steps, not wanting to admit he, too, wanted that trap to work. McGuire had been right, and he knew it; guns and ammunition had to be kept from Gokhlayeh's hands.

With his senses keyed to the movements about him, or lack of, Tommy Lillard moved cautiously back towards the barn and meeting with McGuire. In his attempt to watch both the open streets and the darkened alleys, he almost walked into ready death. It was the voices that saved him. He threw himself to the ground, rolling into the shadows of the boardwalk in full sight of several men standing steps from him in the semi-darkness of a boarded-up store, a light behind them, blinding them to his presence. He froze, waiting, his heart pounding against his ribs, his Colt drawn and ready.

"He won't talk. Not t'ese one."

Miloe grunted as he accepted the packet from the Commanchero leader, his attention centered on the man held up-right between two of Sanchez's Indios,



their faces hidden by the large brims of their sombreros. There was no sign of life. Dressed in black, his head hung forward, his chin to his chest, dark hair accenting lean features and high cheekbones as his head lulled to one side, his eyes were closed to the scenario determining his fate.

"Whatever he knows will go to the grave with him," Sanchez promised. "Take him inside until we find Mantoya..." The two Comancheros half-dragged, half-carried the limp form into the darkened store, leaving the two men alone in sight of the half-hidden Texan.

Miloe fingered the packet thoughtfully, glancing again at the departing figure of the unconscious gunman. "Don't wait, Sanchez. Kill him now. I know that Jasper...McGuire...they have as many lives as a damn cat."

"You have your money, Senor. Be on your way."

Miloe shrugged, thrusting the packet into the front of his tunic, pushing it tightly into the waistband of his trousers. "It's your business, Sanchez, but that was damned careless of you. The name of our contact...the pay-off, had it fallen into the wrong, or should I say, the right, hands, you would have lost your future chances at other shipments."

"And you, Senor Miloe, would have lost your life against the walls of Fort Scott before a firing squad."

Miloe stiffened but made no further comment. Nodding, he turned on his heel, stepping from the walk, narrowly missing the prone Texan who rolled tightly against the boarding, his Colt steady, his finger tightening on the trigger as he waited to be seen.

"Senor?" The Army man halted, turning back. "We will be at the river at the appointed time. If the Army is not..."

"They'll be there."

"Bueno, Amigo. Until next time..."

"Yeah." Miloe turned, lengthening his steps towards the barn and the horse he'd left there, unaware of the dark shadow that lay only steps from him. A moment later, a door opened...closed...and Tommy Lillard was alone in the darkness.

Releasing the Colt's hammer, letting it down slowly, Tommy rolled out of the shadows and stumbled to his feet. He glanced once at the store, then back to the barn where the Army man had disappeared. For a moment, hazel eyes hardened with indecision, then he holstered the Colt and sprinted across the street and into the alley along side the barn.

He moved swiftly, purposely, to the back, letting himself in through the small door the Gunslinger had used hours before. The warmth, the silent comfort of the stable settled around him, cloaking his movements, his steps, as he entered and advanced towards the man in uniform. Miloe, his back to Tommy as he adjusted the girth, was unaware of his presence, but the bay's head jerked up and the man whirled, the horse jumping back at his action as he reached for the covered holster on his hip.

Tommy's hand flashed to his belt, up, back, then forward in a snap of his wrist that sent something moving straight towards the man throwing down on him. Miloe's wrist was snagged by the flying object, the gun falling to the ground, as the quivering point of a knife buried itself into the stall partition behind him, pinning the man's gunhand to the wood by its sleeve.

The Texas moved cautiously forward, keeping his eyes to the pale features of the cavalryman as he scooped up the fallen revolver and leveled it on the hapless man.

"Who the hell are you?!"

"The Joker in this hand," Tommy grunted, swiftly twisting the blade free of the wood, releasing the man's arm. "Turn around and put your face to that wall. Now."

Miloe reluctantly did as he was told, stiffening as rough hands shoved him into the wall, pressing him tight as searching fingers found the packet and pulled it free.

"Never used a blade, huh, Amigo?"

Tommy swore, then slowly relaxed as he recognized the voice behind him. A smile pulled at the corner of his handsome mouth as he turned to meet the Mexican-Irish's amused gaze. "I lied."

Pico McGuire chuckled softly, "So, my friend, it would seem. And that?"

Keeping the Army revolver to the Cavalryman's back, Tommy passed the packet to the Mexican-Irish. "Whatever it is, Cord felt it was important enough to risk his life to get it...and try to keep it."

McGuire hesitated. "Rapido. This is what he found in Sanchez's place?"

"Yeah. What is it?"

Opening the packet, Pico McGuire quickly thumbed through the contents. "Everything we need to finish this. The name of the man supplying the information to Sanchez, the pay-off in American dollars and, the final link, him." He nodded towards Miloe. "Rapido?"

Tommy avoided the man's searching gaze as he reached to the wall, pulled down a piece of baling twine and swiftly bound Miloe's hands behind his back. Finishing, he turned back to the silent man. "Sanchez has him...across the street in a dry-goods store." He stopped as McGuire turned away from him. "Now, where in hell to you think you're goin'?!"

"To Rapido...before it's too late."

"Damn it man, it may already be too late!"

McGuire continued towards the barn doors, the sound of a gun being cocked stopping him just short of leaving. "You're gonna have to use it, Amigo, to stop me."



"He stopped as McGuire turned away."

"Five minutes, McGuire. Give me five minutes."

"If I don't?" McGuire turned slowly to face him, the packet still in his hand. "You'll shoot me? I don't think so."

"One shot, McGuire, will bring everyone on the run. You'll have no chance but to make a run for it...and no chance to help Cord. Will you listen...please." The last word was snapped off short, the hazel eyes hard with a no-nonsense light. "I'm gettin' damned tired of this 'one for all, and all for one' crap... I want to keep my hide, too!"

Pico McGuire drew a deep breath, then nodded slowly. "Make it quick."

"You've got the packet and him..." he nodded towards the bound Cavalryman. That was your job, remember? Now I don't know a lot about this, but enough to know that whatever you're holding meant enough to Cord for him to risk his life to get it and keep it when he needed help just to stay alive long enough to get out of Santa Rosa with it, banking, no doubt, on staying out of Sanchez's hands until they rode out. He almost made it. Okay, he didn't, but you still have a chance. Damn it, McGuire, you're the one who was telling ME how important this is! The importance of getting it into Army hands!"

"Rapido..."

"You can't get to him! I saw at least three men with him. He's unconscious, at best, maybe..." his voice trailed off, not wanting to put his fears into words.

"I can get to him..."

Lillard swore, losing patience with the older man's determined eagerness to court death. "McGuire. You get to him...you still have to get out! Neither of you have a chance in hell of making it! Sanchez hasn't given up. He wants you as badly as Cord."

"But you have a way..." McGuire's brow lifted in doubt.

Tommy drew a deep breath, and slowly let it out. "Yeah, I think I do."

"Que?"

"Take a horse, saddle up...we'll tie this jester to his..." Tommy held up a quick hand, silencing the Mexican's intent to interrupt. "Your horse and Cord's have been found, moved. You'd never get to them. Now listen! Give me five minutes or until you hear shots, then head north. Get clear. Hopefully, no one'll have seen you leave, if everything works."

"You'll be the diversion?" McGuire guessed, seeing the answer in the Texan's eyes. "You'll bring 'em all down on you!"

"Let me worry about that! You get clear of here with that evidence."

"Por que?" McGuire watched the Texan with open puzzlement. "You could do this. Ride clear, take the packet and Miloe to the Army, leave me free to help Rapido..."

"It's your job, McGuire, not mine. Yours and Cord's. He's done his part. Now you do yours!"

"I can't leave him!"

"You don't have any choice!" McGuire fell silent. "You're runnin' out of time, McGuire. What's it gonna be?"

"You..." A sudden thought wrinkled the Mexican-Irish's brow. "You intend to help him, don't you? Why?"

Something sparked in Lillard's eyes before it was quickly hidden. "I have my reasons. Now, get the hell out of here!"

McGuire thoughtfully touched his fingers to his chin, gently rubbing at the cleft there. "I'll do as you say, but we'll pull up half a mile out. And wait. If you're not there in...say, half an hour...I'm stakin' this one over an ant hill and ridin' back.

"Good enough." Tommy gave in, knowing if what he planned failed, a half hour, or an hour, would make no difference to a dead man. He pushed the thought from him. "What will happen when Miloe, here, doesn't get back to the detail before dawn?"

"Nada, the turn towards the river was always planned. He was bluffin'."

"Saddle up then...you'll know when to ride for it."

McGuire slowly reached out his hand to the Texan who hesitated only a moment before taking it. "I don't know why you're helping us...Rapido and me...but..."

Tommy silenced him with a look, their hands tightening, acknowledging words that could not be spoken, before he freed his hand and hurried from the barn.

His mind set to his course of action, Lillard sprinted from the barn, glancing once towards the eastern horizon; the stars were fading, dawn only an hour away--less than that before Sanchez would be forced to pull out of Santa Rosa to make the rendezvous at the river. His time was running out. And Cord's. He forced down the thought that he might already be too late to help the tall gunman.

Reaching the street, the Texan glanced towards the store where he knew the Gunslinger to be; all was quiet, too quiet, but he forced his fears away. Men were milling about the rails, cinches being drawn tight, saddles adjusted, rifles loaded, checked, as the Comancheros got ready to ride on Sanchez's order. When that order came, Tommy knew, it would be too late for the Gunslinger. His jawline hardened, his hand going to the butt of the Colt in his waistband. He melted into the lengthening shadows, drawing the Colt, long practice cocking it as he crouched and made a short run to the opposite side of the street and into the protection of a darkened adobe. Pressed rightly against the building, he edged into the light, moving to the hitchrail before Sanchez's place where the short-coupled sorrel and the leggy bay stood tied. He stopped.

A shadow had pulled away from the porch, leaning against the rail as his head bowed to the light of a struck match, shielding the flame as he touched the match to his rolled smoke. For a moment, he was blinded to the dark shadow

that separated itself from the adobe and advanced towards him, Colt raised. He grunted as the barrel descended, catching him alongside the head as he looked up. He uttered no other sound as he crumbled into the waiting arms of the Texan.

Tommy, grunting under the weight of the half-breed, tested his weight before dragging him into the street and to the half-wild mustang tied there. The animal backed to the end of its reins, eyes rolling as Lillard hoisted the Commanchero's limp body across the gelding's withers and tied him to the saddle, talking to the horse as it snorted its fear at the dead weight on its back.

All remained quiet, the Texan pausing only once to glance about the streets. The search had ended as horses and equipment were being readied for their swift ride to the border, no one seemed interested in the faint shadows that moved among the horses at the far end of the pueblo. He finished the knots then released the mustang, leading it to the end of the adobe's wall, facing it south and the open prairie beyond. Reaching down, he pulled a handful of desert thistle from a weathered plant striving for existence between the boards of the walkway. He sorted out the tiny thorns with a careful hand, then slid them under the edge of the mustang's saddle. The horse snorted, its eyes rolling in discomfort. It side-stepped away, attempting to pull free of the man who held its bridle, to move away from the mounting irritation on its back. Tommy released the bit and stepped back as the horse jumped away from him, bringing his hand down hard on the roan's bony rump. Pulling the trigger on his Colt, he loosened several shots over the frightened animal's head as it bolted from him and towards the open prairie beyond town. Lillard pulled back into the shadows as shouts went up, several men swinging into saddles, as Sanchez stepped from the dry-goods store and into his saddle, sending his men after the running horse.

Lillard smiled. They would expect McGuire to break cover, to make a run for it before dawn. Sanchez's pride could not allow him to forego one more attempt to capture the traitor in his ranks. With guns flashing their deadly message over the half-wild mustang's head, it would run for some time unless one of them overtook it. He had bought himself--and McGuire--his diversion; now he would have to hurry if he wished to reach Cord in time.

He walked to the rail, untied the sorrel and the bay, leading them quickly into the shadows of the buildings, stopping only once to claim his own chestnut. Mounting his horse, leading the others, he moved purposely to the back of the dry-goods store and the end of his quiet search. He could only hope Cord was still alive and that Sanchez had left him lightly guarded. His best chance was still surprise and the fact that while McGuire and Cord's cover was blown, no one was looking for him.

Reining the gelding to a stop, Tommy contemplated his next move. The horses were less likely to be spotted in the back, but they were also less obtainable if needed quickly, which, he expected to be the case. He shrugged. He'd been careful, damned careful, up until now. Now, it was time to put caution to one side. If he were to pull this off, alone, he would need far more luck than caution. He reined the gelding into the alley and moved up to the front of the store. Reaching the shadows, and the corner of the building, he dismounted and ground-tied the horses.

Once again, the Colt revolver slid into his ready hand and he moved out of the darkness and onto the boardwalk in front of the store. He stopped. The pueblo was quiet. The front of the store was empty of the many who had lounged there moments before, the tie-rails deserted. Everything was a deadly silence in the darkness just before dawn. Hazel eyes hardened as he reached for the latch.

With the weight of his lean, saddle-toughened body, Tommy Lillard shoved the door savagely inward, throwing himself forward as he thumbed off his first shot. He hurled himself to the floor, his first shot catching the half-breed in the face as he'd been reaching for his gun. The man fell. Tommy's gun was already levelled on another who'd gotten his gun clear and was trying to level it on the moving target. His gun kicked, but the double roar of the two weapons merged as one, the man getting off only one shot before Tommy's bullet caught him in the chest and spun him around; the stray shot going wide as Lillard rolled further into the small room, looking for another target.

From the corner of his vision, a dark figure stumbled drunkenly from a chair, lurching crazily before throwing himself bodily into another man who, with gun trained on Lillard, missed the Texan's body by only inches as he fell heavily under the weight of the leaner man.

Tommy stumbled to his feet, kicking the gun from the Commachero's hand, then threw a savage right chop to the exposed neck. The man went limp.

"Cord?!" Tommy reached down, struggling to help the leaner man to his feet, steadying him as the Gunslinger attempted to stand alone.

"Sanchez..." The man struggled to speak, "rode out...after McGuire...got to help him...they know..."

Tommy Lillard swore under his breath, bracing his lesser weight against the big man who attempted to pull away. "You two are something else. Come on, we're gettin' the hell out of here. Now! It ain't gonna take Sanchez long to figure out my dumb-assed trick...damned thing's as old as Methuselah's mule..."

He steadied the man in black, giving him a moment to find his balance. Cord was pale, his sharp features drawn with pain but the dark eyes were soft with a puzzled recognition. "You..."

"Yeah, well..." the Texan hedged, "you just never know who's gonna show up when you need 'em, do you? Here...hey, easy." He eased the taller man into the chair, feeling his legs buckling under him. Releasing the gunman, he swiftly tore open the shirt, pulling the tail from the trousers, exposing the hastily dressed wound along Cord's ribs on the left side, just above the belt. The wound was open, fresh blood soaking the already deeply stained scrap of material that had been thrust over it. Grimly, Tommy jerked the scarf from his own neck and applied steady pressure to the wound, then bound it into place. He felt the gunman's muscles contract against the pain, his breathing labored as he fought the pain. "Damn...it's bad." He glanced up, the man's eyes on him. "Think you can sit a horse? We've got to get out of here."

"Hate to walk."

Tommy hesitated, glancing sharply at the pale features of the man called Cord, the dark eyes mirroring something he'd not expected to see in them. "You...know?!"



Cord shook his head, his eyes closing as he bit his lip against a sharp stab of pain in his side. "Not...until now. Haven't had much...time...to think about it." His eyes opened, holding steady to the hazel ones of the Texan. "When you...came through that door...the way you move...your voice..."

"Look...well, huh, I'm sorry. I bought into a hand that wasn't dealt me..."

"Nothing...forced you to...stay...play out the hand."

Compassion touched the Texan's hazel eyes, "We've got to get out of here," he repeated softly. "McGuire's clear, waiting for us to catch up."

Cord attempted to pull himself from the chair, allowing Tommy to steady him as he stood. "My Colt...there, by the door."

The Texan waited until he was sure the gunman could stand unaided, then released him, walked to the small counter on the wall next to the door and scooped up the .44. Returning to the gunman, he slid the revolver into Cord's holster.

"The horses are outside, let's go before..." Something stopped him, and he motioned the gunman to silence. "Horses! Goddamit, they're comin' back!"

He rushed to the door, swinging it open and half-supporting, half-carrying, the gunman, they hurried from the store and into the fading shadows that still sheltered the horses from anyone riding the open streets. He held the sorrel's head as Cord pulled himself into the saddle, grabbing the horn as he swayed uncontrollably in his efforts to stay upright.

Tommy swore, knowing their time had run out. Still, he would not leave the man he'd sought to help. He swung into his saddle; leaning over, he grabbed the sorrel's reins, and with the bay's still tied to the saddle, he reined the horses to the back of the buildings.

There, between the heavier cover of the building's darkest shadows and the low overhang of a cottonwood, he dismounted and stood at the horses' heads, talking quietly to them. His eyes searched the southern end of Santa Rosa, as Sanchez' band of Commancheros galloped into town. They slid to a halt before the store, but only Sanchez dismounted and hurried inside. A moment passed, then two, before he strolled outside shouting hurried orders to his men and swung into his saddle. With the shrill Commanchero yell, they thundered out of town, headed for the border and the dawn attack that could wait no longer.

"They know...I'd never get there in time to warn Wingate. Sanchez'll...be pretty damn...sure of himself...right now. He's in for a...very...nasty surprise." Cord's deep, labored voice trailed off for a moment before he continued. "If...I could have held out...I might have had a nastier one for him...finished this thing here...now."

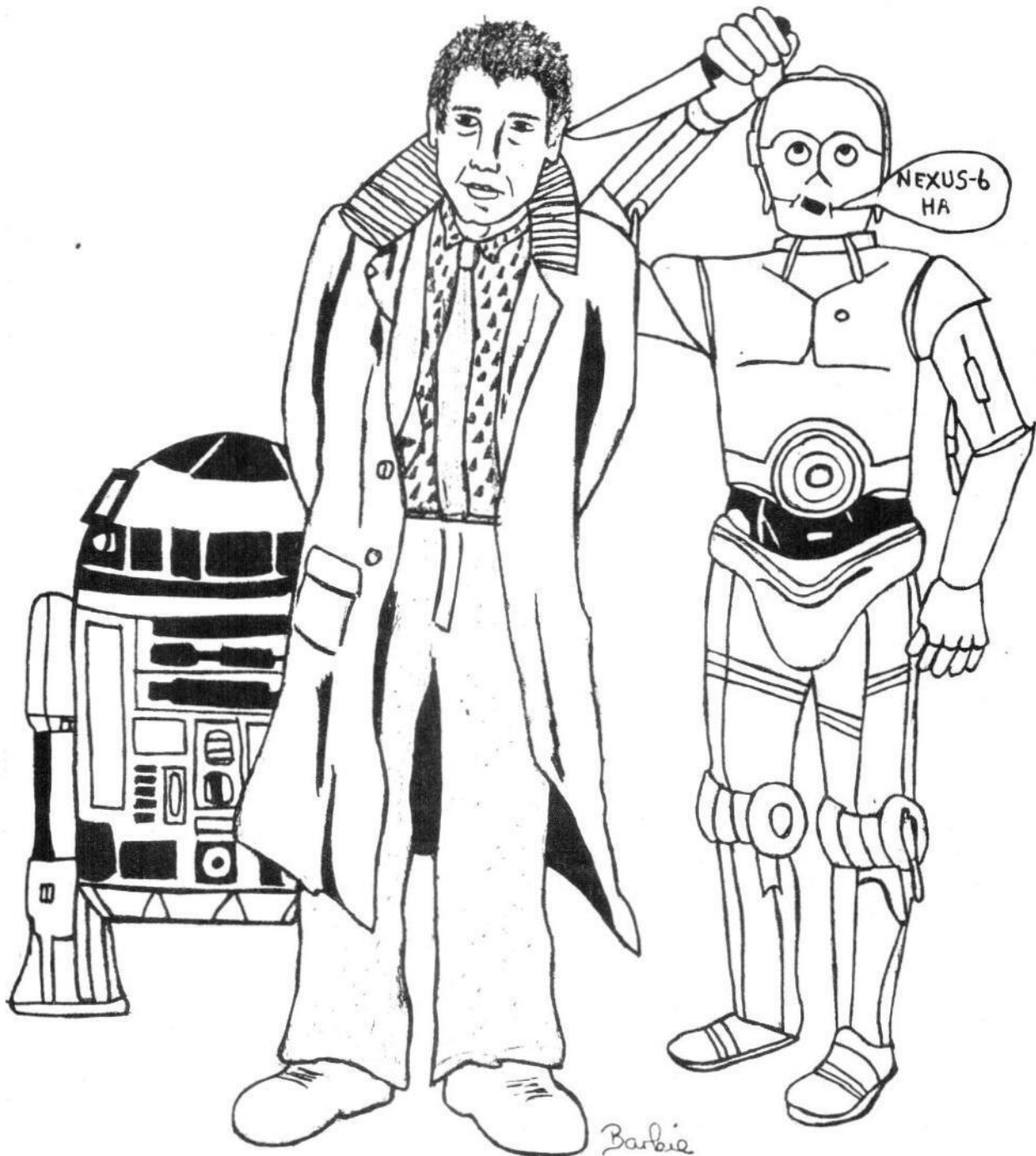
"It's finished," Tommy grunted, turning to stop at the gunman's stirrup. "All you have to worry about is getting back to that fort of yours and a doctor."

"No..." Cord denied. "At best...we've slowed this...down."

Tommy smiled, grasping the younger man's leg. "Trust me, Amigo. It's finished."

Cord nodded, no longer able to talk through the pain.

Lillard checked the dressing about the man's ribs once more, before turning and mounting his chestnut. The small pueblo was coming awake in the first light of dawn, as he reined the horses into the muddy streets and kicked them into a short lope eager to see the last of Santa Rosa...looking forward to reaching another friend who would be waiting for them.



NOTICES

LANDSPEEDER ends its four-year printing history with a final farewell issue: #20/21, due out late July-early August, 1983. Projected contents include JEDI reaction, forums, and the usual offerings of fiction, poetry, articles, and art. Cover price \$3.00 postpaid (Overseas, add \$2.00 U.S.). Submissions accepted for this issue until June 30. Back issues still available in limited quantities: #12, Oct. '81; #14, April '82; #15, July '82; #17, Jan. '83; each \$1.50 pp.; AND #18-#19, April, '83 @ \$3.00. Orders, inquiries to: Lisa A. Adolf, 2115 Rocky Point Road #26B, Bremerton, Washington 98312.

JUNDLAND WASTES - For all the news that fits on the SW universe and how your fellow fans see and write it, including reviews, articles, LOCs, zine listings; the only complete source of information for SW zines. JUNDLAND WASTES is bi-monthly, 20 pages reduced. Subscriptions \$6.00/3 issues. Checks to Pat Nussman, JUNDLAND WASTES, 5851-C Western Run Drive, Baltimore, Maryland 21209.

ALDERAANI IMPERATIVE - A new zine related to SW now available. Fiction by Adolf, Taero, Brin, Laymon and Goldstein, more. Send \$8.50 check or money order for 1st class (add 45¢ if you want it insured) to Pat Nussman, 5851-C Western Run Drive, Baltimore, Maryland 21209.

THE U. S. NEWS & STEELE REPORT - Anne Elizabeth Zeek (TIME WARP) and Pat Nussman (JUNDLAND WASTES and ALDERAANI IMPERATIVE) announce the formation of a new fan-zine dedicated to life, liberty, and the pursuit of scoundrels' identity. A special, one-shot REMINGTON STEELE zine will be brought to you later this year. Submissions of fiction, articles, and artwork are now being solicited. Send these and SASEs to hold for publication to: Pat Nussman, 5851-C Western Run Drive, Baltimore, Maryland 21209.

ON THE MARK - A newsletter for Mark Hamill and Luke Skywalker fans. Published quarterly, \$4.00/year. Contributions of articles by fans who have met Mark, plus filks, cartoons, poetry, SHORT fiction being accepted for future issues. Make checks payable to: Lisa Cowan, P. O. Box 5276, Orange, California 92667.

DOCKING BAY 4 - Special issue! Last chance to read speculations on ROTJ before all our ideas get squashed by The Real Truth that we'll learn on May 25! Fiction by Benedict, Berger, Kreuz, Rhiemmenth, Nussman, Paulson, Crist; art by Lybarger, Varesano, Low, Faraci, Drake, Zan, more. \$8.25 + \$1.75 UPS, or \$2.50 1st class. DOCKING BAY 3 also available; \$10.00 UPS or \$10.50 1st class. Order from Cyndi Hartman, 5114 Highcrest Road, Rockford, Illinois 61107.

LEGENDS OF LIGHT - New SW zine now available. Fiction by Walker, Voll, Hernandez. Art by Dunster, Lybarger, Drake, Low, McPherson, others. Lots of variety! Offset, 333 pages. \$8.50 in person. \$3.00 and SASE for postage to: Susan Voll, 507 Carthage Drive, Xenia, Ohio 45385. Checks payable to Susan Voll. Issue #2 due out Fall, 1983, \$5.00 to reserve; ad exchange welcomed.

KESSEL RUN 3 - Fanzines containing material dealing with the SW universe. Includes stories, poetry and artwork by Nussman, Zeek, Laymon, Hines-Stroede, Stevenson, Benedict, Jeffords, Fetter, Knights, D'Orazio, Lybarger, Faraci, Drake, Dunster, Low, Hawks, Edwards, Ludwig, Ikeguchi, and more. To reserve copy, send \$5.00 and SASE to Michelle Malkin, 6649 Castor Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19149.

CITYSPEAK - A BLADE RUNNER fan network. A new zine on the horizon. Will have trial run of 4 initial issues. If it's a success, it will continue. Will be published every 6 weeks (hopefully) and will run up to 15 pages per issue. \$1.50 per issue or, to show your faith, you can send \$6.00 for all 4. The price includes 1st class postage. Send check or money order to: CITYSPEAK, 622 North Henry, Madison, Wisconsin 53703.

MELANGE - A new fanzine devoted to the many worlds of media fantasy. Premier issue due in May '83. Fiction by Waldron, Hailey, D'Orazio, plus poetry by Brin, Woolverton, Brayton, Taero. Features BLADE RUNNER, THE PRISONER, MAD MAX, MAN FROM ATLANTIS, and others. Price is \$5.00. Please send inquiries and checks to: Pandora Publications, 8601A, West Cermak Road, North Riverside, Illinois 60546. SASE with inquiries would be appreciated.

OUTLANDS CHRONICLES - An all-new zine dedicated to all aspects of all possible SW universes. #1 out in May. Special All-Solo Issue including contributions by Eva Albertsson, Charles Garofalo, Christine Jeffords, Karen Miller, Kathryn Agel, and others; art by Martynn, Wanda Lybarger, Wendy Ikeguchi, Lin Stack, Gennie Summers, etc. Also seeking contributions for #2. SASE Phantom Press, Christine Jeffords, 630 Bloomfield Avenue, Verona, New Jersey 07044 for further information.

THE OLD REPUBLIC READER - Hi. I'm here to urge you to check out a new zine called THE OLD REPUBLIC READER. Each issue of TORR has SW-related poems, artwork, reviews, filk, and enough fiction to fill a space cruiser. Hey, and I'm sure that if you have some talent to lend to the zine, its editor would be glad to accept any contributions. Send copies of work (original artwork preferred) to Gundark Press, c/o Suzy Sansom, 115 Lawnview Circle, Danville, California 94526. So write to the above address for more information 'cuz I know you won't want to miss the special JEDI issue in July. Hey, even if Suzy wasn't paying me fifty credits to say this, I'd still support this zine 'cuz I get awfully tired of reading about Liz Taylor in the National Inquirer back at the base. Sincerely, Han.

ARCHAEOLOGY 101 #3 - Contains Chapter 3 of "Wind Chill," Chapter 4 of "Quest for the Tiger Throne," Chapter 1 of a story by Kathy Retz, poetry, art, toons, LOCs, more. Send SASE for flyer to SOLO VENTURES, c/o Ty Barrett, 3454 Castle Glen Drive, #113, San Diego, California 92123. Also has EMPIRE REVIEW #5; send SASE for flyer.

TALES FOR THE TELLING - A one-shot of two 'true' stories by Karen Ripley (as told to her by her Aunt Rosemary), art by Martynn. "Summer Session" finds a young Rosemary in an archaeology field course taught by Abner Ravenwood. Her attentions are only for Abner, but her (mis)adventures are with Indy as they search for help in the treacherous countryside of Wisconsin. "Cross Purposes" - When Indy unexpectedly waltzes back into Rosemary's life, she finds herself whirled from one hair-raising encounter to the next in the search for the D'Argent Cross. Sounds exciting, right? Sure, if you ignore the danger of getting the map, Neil, the mysterious pilot of the yacht, being shot at (for the second time!), and being pursued by anxious, greedy competitors. But all is not so bleak as Ro and Indy come to terms with their own grief...and each other. Approximately 55 pages. SASE for flyer to SOLO VENTURES, c/o Ty Barrett, 3454 Castle Glen Drive, #113, San Diego, California 92123.

BAD KARMA AND OTHER FALLACIES: THE MOST OF KESSEL RUNDOWN - Texas Karma Publications' Weird World of SWars goes full size and destroys Tokyo. Scheduled features include the best, worst, funniest, and most scatological bits from two

years of C-3PO, Sigmund Droid, Drona Blaritt's Empire and Letters to the Editors; more from Princess Leia's Diary; the complete text of Mauzy's Cineus serial; more fiction and stuff from our regular cast of scum and villainy; plus KRD's Idioticon and the Revised Expanded MGTIEG. New material will be featured; contributions gladly accepted. About 250-300 pages, computer typed, reduced. Scheduled for WorldCon '83. SASE to K. Shepherd Tibbetts, 5861 Keeneland Parkway, Dallas, Texas 75211.

OFFICIAL STAR WARS FAN CLUB - P. O. Box 2202, Dept. F, San Rafael, California 94912. Annual membership fee \$6.00 (\$7.00 Canada, \$8.00 Foreign - U.S. funds only). Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery of membership kit.

VHF - The Harrison Ford Song Cycle. Also Communion, music inspired by BLADE RUNNER, and Candle in the Shadows, the Corellian celebrated in song. All available on cassette from: Martie Benedict, Box 89, Eckert, Colorado 81418-0089. SASE for information on orders.

FOR SALE: Darling, personal photographs of HARRISON FORD at the RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK seminar in Hollywood. Color, 3½" x 5" photos, 2 sets of 8, \$9.00 each postpaid OR get both sets for discount of \$17.50 and receive free bonus photo! Check payable to W. Ikeguchi, 2314 Fashion Avenue, Long Beach, California 90810. Will consider trading if you have a Ford collection--send xerox and SASE.

HARRISON FORD FUN BOOK - Giant collection of over 100 word search and other puzzles based on HEROES, HANOVER STREET, FRISCO KID, STAR WARS, THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK, BLADE RUNNER, RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK, and RETURN OF THE JEDI. Also, test your knowledge on trivia and script quotes quizzes. Great fun for puzzle lovers and especially fen of RAIDERS, BLADE RUNNER, and STAR WAR SAGA films. Very nicely bound and the \$10.00 price includes postage. Solutions included. Money orders please and I will send them out fast. Thank you. Lynda Vandiver, 603 Jones Avenue, Madisonville, Kentucky 42431.

TRI-CON - "The Weekend of the Hawk" - October 1 and 2, 1983. Special Guest Star: Thom "Hawk" Christopher. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. For information (flyer), SASE to Trinetta L. Kern, 1037 Francis Road, Castle Shannon, Pennsylvania 15234.

FLIP OF A COIN - GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

Actually, they're fairly simple. All stories should be typed, double spaced, and preferably grammatically correct. We would prefer not to have continued stories, if at all possible; i.e., the whole story should be contained in one issue. The biggest requirement, though, is that it must be in character. Also, keep it PG rated, please.

We are requesting that everyone send in two copies of their submissions; that way we'll have a copy to send to the artist for illos. This, in turn, helps everyone in that it will keep expenses down, which will keep the price of FLIP down. Also, please include a SASE.

As far as the artwork goes, we prefer receiving good, dark copies; something we can keep and use in paste-ups. The best method is to obtain good xeroxes and "darken them down." These enhanced copies work very well and the real beauty in this method is that should something happen to your work, we can get another copy from you. Also, since we do not want to reduce any artwork, please make them no larger than 8½ x 11.



The first issue of the new zine, FLIP OF A COIN, dedicated to the characters portrayed by Harrison Ford, is now completed and ready for distribution. It is 112 pages, offset printed, and packed to the brim with stories, poems, artwork, etc.

The cost will be \$6.50 plus \$1.90 for first class postage.

We think you will enjoy FLIP and to let you know what you'll be getting for your money, the following is a preview of the contents.

A Rainbow Above You by D. C. Wickes; artwork by Wanda Lybarger and Wickes. Kenny Boyd and Annie McBride were both trying to hide; instead, they found each other. This feature is another in the series of stories with characters created by Sherry Magee and Wickes.

Discovery by Sherry Magee; artwork by Lybarger. A follow-up to A Rainbow Above You. Annie is away and Ken is left alone with Jenny, the cat.

A Toast to Innocence by Peggy Barilla. Tommy Lillard, an old acquaintance, a bottle of whiskey, and memories.

Starting Again by Paula Truelove; artwork by D. C. Wickes. Halloran returns to Hanover Street with intentions of seeing Margaret.

AnOther by Scheherazade; artwork by Wendy Ikeguchi. A post-"Jedi" tale. An agreement between Han Solo and Darth Vader?

Reply to a Conversation by J. A. Berger; artwork by D. C. Wickes. Harry Caul thought it could be no worse. Martin Stett had other plans.

"Plus Cea Change..." by Pat Nussman; artwork by Wanda Lybarger. Tommy and Avram encounter a school marm that's a real "princess."

FLIP OF A COIN also includes other features by Martie Benedict, Marcia Brin, Jacqueline Taero, Wendy Ikeguchi, Ruth Radecki, Donna Oakes, Betsy Peed, and Melody Corbett.

Checks or money orders should be made payable to FLIP OF A COIN, in the amount of \$8.40 and mailed to:

FLIP OF A COIN
c/o Paula Truelove & Jenny McAdams
502 McKeithan, #4A
Tallahassee, Florida 32304



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